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A HISTORY OF ORIGINAL FREE WILL BAPTISTS



Div. Sch.
286.209
P393
H673
1996

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ORIGINAL FREE WILL BAPTISTS

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MOUNT OLIVE COLLEGE PRESS
MOUNT OLIVE, NC

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Library of Congress Catalog Number: 93-80106

ISBN: 1-880994-26-7

**Published for: Mount Olive College Press
634 Henderson Street
Mount Olive College
Mount Olive, NC 28365**

**By: Free Will Baptist Press
Foundation, Inc.
811 North Lee Street
P. O. Box 159
Ayden, NC 28513**

**Endorsed as an official publication of the Convention of
Original Free Will Baptists by approval of the Executive
Administrator in consultation with a committee appointed to
read and review the manuscript.**

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Cover design: Jerry Goff

Preface

Original Free Will Baptists are the spiritual descendants of the General Baptists who settled in North Carolina during the colonial period. These General Baptists were the earliest Baptists to settle in the colony and were among the earliest organized religious groups in the colony, preceded only by the Quakers and the Anglicans. The story of these early Baptists has often been overshadowed by the accounts of other and later religious movements which swept through the settlements of North Carolina and the rest of the region which became known as the South.

Once this denomination had adopted the name Free Will Baptist and had begun to develop its own identity, they then began to preserve some account of their annual conferences, without which it would be impossible for one to know very much about them, apart from the oral traditions passed on from generation to generation. In the late nineteenth century there appeared two accounts of their history in North Carolina. The first was a summary account of their origin in this state, written by Rufus K. Hearn about 1880, and the second consisted of a revised and enlarged version of Hearn's account of their beginnings and a more detailed history of their pilgrimage through the nineteenth century, using abstracts of the minutes of the conferences during this period and written by Thad F. Harrison and J. M. Barfield. The latter was published in 1897 and served to inform a later generation of Free Will Baptists concerning their heritage.

During the twentieth century more adequate records of this denomination have been kept and more attention has been given to preserving such materials, especially during the last few decades. In addition, research has turned up more information on the early period, including the colonial and the English General Baptist background of the denomination. As a result it is possible to give a more comprehensive and more accurate account of the denomination's history.

For many years the author has had a deep interest in the history of Original Free Will Baptists. That interest, which began

in his youth, was greatly increased after he was invited to join the faculty in the department of religion at Mount Olive College, a liberal arts college sponsored by the denomination. Still later he was offered the opportunity to teach a course on the history, doctrine, and polity of the Free Will Baptist Church. In the course of time the idea that he should undertake to write a history of the denomination began to take root and finally came to fruition following his retirement from the college.

If one should inquire as to the motive for such an undertaking, it is that a better knowledge of this religious body on the part of the general public is an important consideration. Very little of a scholarly nature has been written about this denomination, leaving most people to speculate about them or to ignore them altogether. Equally important is that Free Will Baptists themselves should know as much as possible about their heritage. The lack of such knowledge can only hinder their ability to appreciate and support the teachings and inherent values of their own denomination and the part which it plays in the larger scope and mission of the church universal. It is the hope of the author that this book will contribute to the increase of knowledge of that heritage and a growing appreciation for the values which it represents.

The reader needs to be reminded that a task of this kind cannot be as comprehensive as one might wish. There is much more to be written about Original Free Will Baptists than could be included in this volume. The history of individual conferences since the early part of this century, the history of local churches, the history of institutions established by the denomination, and the many exemplary lives of those who have taken their places in carrying out the mission of the church can hardly receive the attention they deserve in a work such as this. The task of giving some account of these matters has already been taken up by some students and former students in the past and it is hoped that many more will add to what has been written.

One feature of this book which some denominational histories fail to include is the attention given to the larger historical context in which the particular narrative of events is described. Often it

is possible to reach a better understanding of the special circumstances at a given point in a church's history if one can see the larger picture of contemporary events, especially in American religious history, that may affect developments within a particular denomination. Wherever such treatment of the larger context is found in this book, it is hoped that the reader will see it as an opportunity to acquire a more balanced view of what has happened among Original Free Will Baptists.

The preparation of this book has involved numerous persons who have provided assistance in one form or another. The author wishes to express appreciation to all those who have contributed their time and a variety of documents and other materials that have helped to make the Free Will Baptist Collection at Mount Olive College what it is today, to Mr. Gary Barefoot and members of the library staff at Mount Olive College for their help in locating research materials, to Mrs. Sandra Katz for her painstaking work in putting the manuscript on computer, to Scott Sowers for his work in producing the final hard copy, to the members of the editorial committee who read the manuscript and made helpful suggestions, and to Dr. Pepper Worthington who performed the many tasks of an editor. Finally, the author would like to acknowledge the patience and support of his wife, Betty, whose timely assistance and encouragement enabled him to complete yet another project.

Chapter I
The English Background

The Protestant Reformation was well underway on the European Continent before its impact would be felt in England. When the English monarch, Henry VIII, initiated the break with the Roman Church, it had little to do with the changes taking place in Germany and neighboring states. Whereas reformers like Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Ulrich Zwingli were dealing with a wide range of issues affecting the nature of the church, Henry was interested in securing the power of the English throne and in removing any obstacle which the church might place in the way of his gaining a male heir to the throne. Because the Pope would not grant Henry a divorce from his wife, Catherine, he resolved to obtain one by whatever means. In the end he was recognized by the English clergy and Parliament as the supreme head of the Church of England. Yet no substantial reforms were carried out in the church. In fact, Henry used his power to suppress the monasteries and laid claim to their wealth as a means of building up the royal treasury. In 1539 his Act of Six Articles upheld the doctrine of transubstantiation, forbade priests to marry, and retained the practice of confessing sins to God in the presence of a priest. Opposition to this act brought widespread persecution of persons who sought reforms similar to those which had been introduced on the European continent.

When Henry VIII died in 1547 he was succeeded by his son, Edward VI, who was but ten years of age. Men who had fled to Protestant centers in Europe during Henry's reign returned to England under Edward, bringing with them ideas for reforming the Church of England. By this time new translations of the English Bible were being used in the churches and there was growing support for the changes being introduced by the king's Council and by Parliamentary decree.

But when Edward died in 1553, Mary, the daughter of Catherine, became England's ruler. She reversed the trend toward Protestantism, restored the ties with Rome, and launched a

persecution against Protestant leaders in which more than three hundred were put to death, earning her the title of "Bloody Mary." Scores of others crossed the English Channel to escape persecution and settled in such cities as Geneva, Zurich, Basel, Strassburg, and Emden. There they imbibed Protestant, mainly Reformed teachings, and trained other men who, it was hoped, would become ministers in a truly reformed Church of England.

On the death of Mary in 1558, Elizabeth was recognized as the legitimate heir to the throne. She tried to steer a middle course between Romanism and Protestantism with an emphasis on royal supremacy. Catholic plots against her life forced her to break completely with Rome and to defend England against the Spanish Armada, which was sent to crush her opposition to a united Europe under Catholic influence.

Many English churchmen who had returned to England from the continent at the beginning of Elizabeth's reign had hoped to carry out extensive reforms in the Church in accordance with what they perceived as the New Testament model of the church. They wanted to abandon practices such as the wearing of vestments and surplices by the clergy and to institute either a presbyterial or a congregational form of church government to replace the rule of bishops, which they regarded as contrary to New Testament teachings. These men became known as Puritans because of their desire to purify the church and to reform it more completely along Protestant lines. They ran into stiff opposition from the queen who did not approve of such changes as they advocated. With help from Parliament she was able to enforce uniformity by simply depriving Puritan clergy of their benefices when they refused to comply with ecclesiastical laws. When John Whitgift was appointed Archbishop of Canterbury in 1583, he rigorously implemented Elizabeth's ideas for the government of the church, leaving many parishes without clergy.

While most Puritans wanted to remain in the Church of England and wait until such time as the queen and Parliament would institute the desired reforms, there were a few men who began to advocate separation from the church and the formation

of independent congregations. They decided to leave the Church of England on the grounds that it was not a true church and to seek reformation "without tarrying for any." Robert Browne was an early leading figure among these Separatists. Two other Separatist leaders in London, John Greenwood and Henry Barrow, were hanged in 1593 as examples of official reaction to the Separatist movement. Others fled to Holland to escape heavy fines or imprisonments. An entire congregation under the leadership of Francis Johnson left England and settled at Amsterdam as early as 1594. The laws affecting religious uniformity were drawn up by Parliament and strictly enforced during the latter years of Elizabeth's reign (1558-1603). Anyone advocating Separatist views was likely to face severe penalties if apprehended.

When Elizabeth died, the Puritans looked to her successor, James I, for leadership in bringing about the reforms which they had failed to obtain under Elizabeth. Because James I had been brought up under the tutelage of Calvinist leaders in Scotland, they presented him with a petition to abolish certain abuses in worship and eliminate practices which they regarded as the remnants of popery. Although James I agreed to a conference with the Puritan clergy, the only thing which resulted from it was his approval to undertake a new translation of the English Bible (later published as the Authorized Version in 1611). Despite the fact that James I wanted to maintain Anglicanism much as it had been under Elizabeth, most English Puritans had no desire to leave the Church of England, for they still believed in an established church, one which was sanctioned and supported by the civil authorities, including king and Parliament. The idea that citizens could dissent from the established church and escape the penalties of such dissent was not yet a part of the English tradition.

This brief sketch of the English Reformation will provide the setting for an understanding of the role of John Smyth in the founding of the English General Baptists. We know nothing of the life of John Smyth until he entered Christ's College at Cambridge in 1586. Several important figures at Cambridge during this period held Puritan views, one of which was Francis Johnson who

became Smyth's tutor. Johnson later became the pastor of an English Separatist congregation which sought refuge in Amsterdam, Holland. Having been brought up in the Church of England, Smyth was introduced to Puritan views at Cambridge, where in 1594 he was appointed a Fellow of Christ's College and was ordained by the Bishop of Lincoln. In 1598 he vacated his fellowship and in 1600 he was appointed Lecturer to the city of Lincoln, a position which he held only two years. Such lecture-ships were accepted by Puritan minded clergy because of the relative freedom they provided from ecclesiastical control. However, Smyth became involved in controversy at Lincoln and was described by his opponents as "a factious man", which led to his dismissal. In 1603 he was deprived of the right to preach or read any lecture in the province of Canterbury. He then moved to Gainsborough where he was soon in trouble for preaching there in spite of an order against it by the Bishop of Lincoln.¹

As late as March 26, 1606, when he was again charged with preaching without license, Smyth was considered by those who heard him preach in the Gainsborough parish church as loyal to the Anglican Church.

But it was later that same year that Smyth began to identify himself with the Separatist cause. For several years he had tried to remain a loyal Anglican and had even once argued against the view that the Church of England was in a state of apostasy. Then after several months of uncertainty he decided to join a Separatist congregation at Gainsborough, which chose him as their pastor. This congregation had earlier been a part of a fellowship of Separatists from Scrooby and Gainsborough, which for convenience had decided to form two congregations. The Scrooby congregation later emigrated to Holland and settled for a few years at Leyden from whence they later returned to England. In 1620 many of them embarked for the New World and founded Plymouth Colony, the second successful English colony in America.

The Separatist congregation at Gainsborough soon found that they could not remain in England unless they were prepared to face heavy fines and possible imprisonment. Following the lead

of other Separatists, they decided in 1608 to emigrate to Amsterdam, funds being provided by one of their more wealthy members, Thomas Helwys. Although in Amsterdam they found a greater freedom to practice their religion, the conditions for a peaceful life were by no means ideal for these English exiles. They soon became involved in quarrels with other Separatists, brought on by the fact that they had broken with the long tradition of the Anglican Church and had entered into a solemn covenant "as the Lord's free people, ... to walk in all His ways, made known or to be made known unto them, according to their best endeavors, whatsoever it might cost them, the Lord assisting them."² They felt strongly that they should be guided by the Scriptures in their efforts to restore the true church, but their leaders did not always agree as to how the Scriptures were to be interpreted. Francis Johnson, pastor of the London congregation, which had settled at Amsterdam, placed more emphasis on the role of elders in governing the affairs of the congregation, but Smyth held that the authority of the church was vested in the entire congregation which included laymen as well as elders. Smyth also took issue with Johnson on the use of Scripture in divine worship, contending that there was no warrant for the reading of an English translation as an integral part of divine worship, though it might be used as a means to prepare for spiritual worship. He thought that the minister when expounding the Scriptures should bring only the original Hebrew and Greek and make a spontaneous translation since to read an English translation tended toward formality and would be more likely to quench the Spirit than the use of a free translation made on the spot. Moreover, he argued, the original Hebrew and Greek were inspired while written translations were not, since they were the work of men and therefore were subject to error. He also objected to sermons being read and to psalms being sung from a book, both of which smacked of too much formality in worship.³

The separation from the Church of England had prompted Smyth and his congregation to search the Scriptures more diligently for guidance concerning the nature of the church and its proper

constitution. At first they held that the true church consisted of those who had entered into covenant with God and with one another to be obedient to the divine commandments. Further study of the New Testament led Smyth to the view that only those who had been baptized upon repentance toward God and faith in Christ were to be admitted to the church and that the baptism of infants is not sanctioned by the New Testament. Such a view led them to conclude that the baptism which they had received in the Church of England was not valid and if they wished to form a true church, they must submit to believers' baptism as the only true Christian baptism. Only so could they constitute a true church according to the New Testament model. But such an action would be open to criticism and would set Smyth and his congregation apart from other Separatists in Amsterdam. It would be following the course of the despised Ana-baptists, against whom so much calumny had been heaped ever since the Münster affair in 1534 when a group of Ana-baptists seized that city and held it until it was recaptured about a year later. Afterwards the Ana-baptists were branded as revolutionaries by both Catholics and Protestants.

But how were Smyth and his followers to realize their aim of being baptized, thus enabling them to enter the covenant with God which only believers could share? The British Baptist historian, Whitley, describes what happened. "Pastor and deacons laid down their office, the church disbanded or avowed itself no church, and all stood as private individuals, unbaptized. All being equal, Smyth proposed that Helwys, their social leader, should baptize them, but he deferred to his spiritual leader. Smyth therefore baptized himself, then baptized Helwys and the others."⁴ The method of baptism was not by immersion but by affusion, that is by pouring water on the head of the person being baptized. Smyth's act of baptizing himself drew criticism from other Separatists who inquired by what authority he had done so. Finally he was persuaded through his contacts with the Waterlander Mennonites (Dutch Ana-baptists) that he should have turned to one of their elders for baptism. However, he failed to convince Thomas Helwys and ten other members of his congregation that in

baptizing himself he had acted without proper sanction. Earlier he had maintained that ecclesiastical authority rested with the congregation as a whole with Christ as its head and that any action might be taken to correct an error in doctrine or practice in order to constitute a true church without deference to tradition. Now the Dutch Mennonites had convinced him that only elders have authority to baptize and that he could have received baptism by one of their elders. Helwys and his group did not accept this argument for it appeared to be dependent upon the old ideas of apostolic succession which they had rejected in consequence of their separation from the Church of England. The Helwys group therefore decided to excommunicate Smyth and his followers and declared themselves to be the true church.

Smyth continued his communications with the Mennonites, seeking admission to their church by formal application and the exchange of confessions of faith. He concluded that since the Mennonites were a true church, it was proper to be joined with them rather than assume that anyone might begin anew by baptizing oneself and others in order to constitute a true church. Smyth's efforts to join the Mennonites did not meet with quick success, for their application was opposed by Helwys and his group who wrote a letter explaining their differences with Smyth and asking them not to give Smyth's group a hasty welcome. The Mennonites also sought advice from other groups as to what they should do. It was not until after John Smyth died of tuberculosis in 1612 that his followers were finally received into fellowship by the Dutch Mennonites in January 1615.

In one of Smyth's confessions of faith, which he submitted to the Mennonites, it becomes clear that another important development had taken place in his theological pilgrimage in that he had adopted some of the views of the Dutch theologian, Arminius. It was at this very time that the teachings of Jacob Arminius had stirred controversy in the Dutch Reformed Church and men like Smyth and Helwys could hardly fail to be aware of the issues involved. In fact, both of these men shared Arminius' view that Christ's redemption is intended for all persons, that God created

mankind with freedom of will which is not lost by original sin, that infants are conceived and born in innocency so that if they die in this state they are saved from eternal death, that God does not create or predestinate any one to destruction, and that the way of life and salvation lies in Christ. It was such views as these that would be distinctive of the later General Baptists who sprang from that part of Smyth's congregation which chose to follow Thomas Helwys and thus refused to become part of the Dutch Mennonite Church.

Helwys and his group soon thereafter reached the conclusion that they should not continue their exile in Amsterdam but should return to their native England in order to persuade others among their countrymen of the rightness of their cause. It was therefore at great risk that they returned to London and established the first Baptist church in England just outside the city of London in Spitalfields. Helwys, a layman, was chosen as pastor of the congregation. He soon published a confession of faith in which he affirmed his belief in the general atonement, a view that Christ died for all persons and not for the elect only. He distinguished himself from the Mennonites by defending the taking of oaths and allowing that one might serve as a magistrate and still be a member of the Church of Christ.

In the same year that Helwys' congregation returned to England he published *A Short Declaration of the Mystery of Iniquity* in which he declared his views on religious liberty, the right of every individual to hold any religious opinions without interference on the part of earthly rulers. It was the first such defense of universal religious liberty in England, a view that has become a part of the Baptist tradition in America. A copy of this little book is now in the Bodleian Library at Oxford University. It contains a dedication to King James I, signed by Thomas Helwys. In it Helwys rejects the notion that the king has any authority over the immortal souls of his subjects, to make ordinances or set spiritual lords over them. (The king was the head of the Church of England.) Such a challenge to the king's authority would not go unnoticed. Helwys was sent to prison where he

remained until his death.

John Murton, another member of this General Baptist congregation, succeeded Helwys as leader. He too advocated the principle of religious liberty and was likely imprisoned for his views. Despite the crisis of leadership the church continued to grow and by 1626 at least four other General Baptist churches had sprung up in other locations. Occasional contacts were made between these churches and the Dutch Mennonites, with whom they sought to have friendly relations. The two groups could not agree on certain matters, including the taking of oaths and bearing arms, with the result that no real union between them was possible.

The views of these General Baptists on the general atonement and on believers' baptism made it difficult for them to persuade other Puritan types concerning the validity of their position. Their view of the atonement (that Christ's death was for all persons) had been condemned at the Synod of Dort in Holland in 1618-19 and their rejection of infant baptism lumped them with the Ana-baptists on the continent, who were persecuted by both Protestants and Catholics. Until the beginning of the English Civil War (1640-49) they would be subject to the same disabilities as all other Englishmen who refused to submit to ecclesiastical laws, which were even more vigorously enforced in the early years of the reign of Charles I (1625-1649).

It was during this time that another group of English Baptists arose which became known as Particular Baptists because of their belief in limited atonement. They shared with other Puritans and many Anglicans the doctrine that Christ died only for the elect. The first Particular Baptist church resulted from a controversy in an Independent congregation in London which had enjoyed a succession of gifted Puritan minded pastors, including Henry Jacob, John Lathrop, and Henry Jessey. In 1638 six members of this congregation withdrew to form a group which held that infant baptism was unscriptural. They became a Particular (Calvinist) Baptist church and chose as their paster John Spilsbury. Soon

thereafter the question arose among them as to the proper mode of baptism. One of their number, Richard Blunt, became convinced that baptism should be by immersion as suggested by Paul's references to baptism in Romans, Chapter 6. Because he knew of no one who baptized in this manner, he traveled to Holland and was baptized by the Dutch Collegiants, who were an offshoot from the Mennonites. Having returned to England he baptized Mr. Blalock, the teacher of the church, and they in turn baptized fifty-one others.⁵ The General Baptists likewise adopted this mode of baptism as shown in their earliest confessions of faith.

As one of several sects which developed during the English civil wars, followed by the Protectorate of Oliver Cromwell (1640-58), Baptists constituted a small minority of the population. Their views on baptism, in particular, drew criticism from Anglicans, Presbyterians, and Independents, all of whom were Paedo-baptists (baptized infants). As a result numerous tracts and pamphlets either opposing or defending the Baptist position were published during this period. There were able defenders of the Baptist view, such as William Kiffin and Hanserd Knollys, both of whom were Particular Baptists. The outbreak of the Civil War provided all those who had chafed under the threat of persecution by the civil and ecclesiastical authorities the opportunity for freer expression of their views. The great majority of Puritans favored a state church modeled after the Reformed Church in Geneva. Even Parliament, locked in a struggle with King Charles I, looked favorably on the Presbyterian model for the Church of England. Therefore, a convocation of clergy, known as the Westminster Assembly, was convened in 1643 to recommend reform measures for the state church. They drew up a confession of faith, a directory of worship, and a catechism that would have a decided influence on Presbyterian doctrine and worship down to the present century. Congregationalists and Particular Baptists would soon prepare confessions of faith based on the theology of the Westminster Confession.

General Baptists published a confession of faith in 1651, signed by 61 persons representing 30 congregations in the Mid-

lands.⁶ It consisted of 75 articles covering both doctrine and practice and was the first confession published by an association of General Baptists. It was basically in agreement with the first General Baptist confession, prepared by Thomas Helwys with the help of his little flock in 1611. The primary purpose of such confessions as the one prepared in 1651 was to clarify Baptists' beliefs and practices at a time when there was instability in the political climate in England and confusion in the religious sphere. During the period of Presbyterian dominance while the nation was engaged in a civil conflict, Baptists were under attack from the Presbyterian clergy. Then after Cromwell's army marched on Parliament and arrested many of its members in 1648, a new order was finally established with Cromwell as Lord Protector in 1653. Baptists fared better during this period because they had played an important role in Cromwell's New Model Army. Unlike the Continental Ana-baptists who refused to bear arms, English Baptists joined the ranks of Cromwell's army in which they served as foot soldiers, officers, and as regimental chaplains. While engaged in the struggle against royalist forces they seized the opportunity to make converts and establish churches in various places. As a result their numbers increased and the number of Baptist congregations multiplied. By 1660 there were scores of Baptist churches in several parts of England and in Wales. Estimates of the total number range from 246 to 297 congregations. General Baptists were concentrated mainly in the southern counties, in London and in the Midlands.

The English nation had been in the throes of civil war during the 1640's prompted by the harsh policies of Charles I and Archbishop William Laud, who had been chosen for that high office in 1633. Laud was determined to force conformity upon an unwilling clergy and people in the Church of England. As many as 20,000 Puritan-minded citizens had decided to leave England in the 1630's to settle in New England. Entire congregations along with clergymen, driven by their desire to establish churches in the new world where they would be free of the restraints placed upon them by ecclesiastical authorities in their homeland, chose to make

their homes in the wilderness of New England. Others remained to carry on the struggle for a more thoroughgoing reformation of the Church of England, something which both King and Parliament had resisted since the reign of Elizabeth I. But in 1640 through a series of high-handed measures taken by Charles I, including an attempt to seize several radical Puritan members of Parliament and arrest them for treason, the country was plunged into civil war. Parliament was by now controlled by a Puritan majority which proceeded to abolish episcopacy and called for an assembly of clergymen to advise them. This assembly recommended measures which marked the triumph of Puritan Presbyterianism in the Church of England. This triumph was not to last long before it came into conflict with Cromwell's vision of an established church. When Parliament passed laws which sought to enforce conformity to a Presbyterian establishment, Cromwell's army, which included Baptists and the more radical Puritan sects, forced an unwilling Parliament to submit to its control. The army had defeated the royalist forces and had captured Charles I who was charged with treason and finally beheaded on January 30, 1649. In 1653 Cromwell dismissed Parliament and assumed full control as Lord Protector. Under the Protectorate a large degree of religious toleration was allowed though the church was still under state control. However, Cromwell's rule failed to satisfy all the competing factions in the body politic. At his death the nation was in danger of being torn apart. His son, Richard, was asked to assume his father's mantle of authority but he was not equal to the task. By the beginning of 1660 the level of dissension had reached the point that many felt the result would be anarchy. Hence, they were prepared to welcome the restoration of the monarchy under the royal heir, Charles II. In April of that year this eldest son of Charles I, while in exile, issued his declaration of Breda promising full pardon to all, a free Parliament, and liberty of conscience in matters not affecting the peace of the kingdom.

While Cromwell ruled England there were dissident groups like the Fifth Monarchists, who believed that the time was near when the present regime would be overthrown and the saints

would rule with Christ. The visions described in the book of Daniel concerning the four kingdoms soon to be destroyed by "a stone not made with human hands" was the basis of this movement. Such views were disturbing to the ruling authorities, for some Fifth Monarchists were ready to hasten the coming of Christ's kingdom by taking up arms against those who ruled England. Cromwell had arrested several army officers, believed to be Fifth Monarchists, and accused them of conspiring to overthrow the government. Some Baptists, as well as other non-conformists, had joined the ranks of the Fifth Monarchists. It was a time of suspicion and mistrust, directed especially against groups like the General Baptists, who had long been outside the established church as well as England's ruling class.

All English Baptists, often called Ana-baptists as a term of reproach, were still the objects of slander in circles sympathetic toward royalty. In a time of near anarchy following the death of Oliver Cromwell it was easy for many to believe that English Baptists might not support a move to restore the monarchy and that they might indeed foment another revolution which would bring more bloodshed to a country that had grown weary of strife.

It was against this background that in March 1660 the General Baptists held their annual assembly in London at which time they approved "A Brief Confession or Declaration of Faith," which soon became the standard confession of this Baptist body. Other statements of faith had preceded this one and at least one other, the Orthodox Creed of 1679, would be published later, but none ranked in importance with the Confession of 1660. Forty signatures of prominent General Baptists were affixed to the document. Some of these men would later suffer imprisonment or fines because of their faith. Their purpose in publishing such a declaration of faith was "... to inform all men (in these days of scandal and reproach) of an innocent belief and practice, for which we are not only resolved to suffer persecution, to the loss of our goods, but also life itself, rather than decline the same." They were particularly concerned to refute any rumors that they were plotting violent action against those who disagreed with them. They

plainly denied any such intention in a statement near the end of the document:

"Moreover we do utterly, and from our very hearts, in the Lord's fear, declare against all those wicked and devillish reports, and reproaches, falsely cast upon us (in and about the City of "London") had lately GOTTEN KNIVES, HOOKED KNIVES, and the like, ... intending to cut the throats of such as were contrary minded to us in matters of Religion"

These General Baptists were law abiding citizens of the realm who stood ready to bear the reproaches cast upon them if only they might have the liberty to exercise their beliefs. They were bold defenders of the view that all people should have "the free liberty of their own consciences in matters of Religion, or Worship, without the least oppression or persecution" That they hoped for a continuation of this liberty under a restored monarchy may be seen from the fact that they presented a copy of their confession to Charles II at the time of the restoration in 1660.⁷

Because of the unrest among certain elements of the population following the restoration of the monarchy and the harsh response of the civil authorities against those who were accused of sedition, Baptists and other Dissenters were to suffer much during the reign of Charles II. Some Baptists refused to take the Oath of Allegiance required by the king. One such group published a declaration in 1659 describing themselves as "a small society of baptized believers, undergoing the name of freewillers, about the City of London" and signed by Henry Adis, Richard Pilgrim and William Cox.⁸ In it they replied to several false accusations against them, but they refused to take oaths, saying "we look upon it to be our duty to keep ourselves from oaths, engagements and covenants, either for or against this or that person, government, or persons whatsoever: for because of swearing the land mourneth, Jerem. 23-10"⁹ Adis and members of his group were General Baptists who adhered to the principles

set forth in Hebrews 6:1-2 and were frequently referred to as Six Principle Baptists. Adis himself was subsequently imprisoned for his boldness in printing a sermon addressed to the king in which he rejected the use of flattering words, choosing to speak plainly his refusal to swear allegiance or to fight for the king.¹⁰

Following the restoration of Charles II, the first Parliament elected was loyal to the king and to Anglicanism. The Presbyterians, who had dominated the national church before Cromwell came to power, may have hoped to share in the new religious settlement but such was not to happen. The Anglicans were able to capitalize on a widespread reaction against Puritanism and to capture the machinery and endowments of the national church. Between 1661 and 1665 Parliament passed a series of acts known as the Clarendon Code which were intended to enforce loyalty to the king and to drive the Dissenters from the established church. The Act of Uniformity (1662) required beneficed clergy to use the revised Book of Common Prayer and to take an oath of "unfeigned assent and consent to all and everything contained and prescribed" in it. Some eighteen hundred ministers gave up their positions rather than take the oath. Most of these were Presbyterians and Congregationalists but a few were Baptists, who had accepted appointments in Cromwell's national church. The Conventicle Act imposed fines or imprisonment for attending a service at which five or more persons not of the same household were in attendance if the service was other than that prescribed by the Book of Common Prayer. Baptists and other Dissenters sometimes met in barns or in the woods to hold religious services because their meeting houses were closed by the authorities and their homes at times were invaded. The Act was renewed in 1670 with less severe penalties for attending unlawful services but giving the authorities the right to collect fines imposed on preacher and hearers from anyone in attendance.

These and other acts of Parliament intended to enforce conformity to the Established Church and to deprive Dissenters of any religious rights were set aside by the Act of Toleration in 1689. This came about as a result of the "Glorious Revolution"

of 1688 when James II fled in the face of a Dutch invasion under William of Orange who was earlier married to Mary, daughter of James. William and Mary were then made King and Queen of England. James had succeeded his brother, Charles, as king upon the death of the latter in 1685. He then set out on a policy to make England a Catholic country in keeping with his own religious preference. In 1687 he issued a Declaration of Indulgence, which allowed complete religious toleration for Dissenters even though his real aim was to grant to Catholics the liberty of worship in their own homes. This action stirred up the opposition to a Roman Catholic king so that even Protestant Dissenters joined with Anglicans in welcoming the new monarchs. In the following year (1689) Parliament passed the Act of Toleration, which allowed freedom of worship to Dissenters provided they took the Oaths of Allegiance and Supremacy to William and Mary. Their meeting houses had to be registered with the proper authorities and dissenting ministers were expected to sign the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England. English Baptists were now able to enjoy more freedom of worship than at any time in their history.

General Baptist Church Polity and Practice

The General Baptists of England held different views on church government from those of the Particular Baptists, judging from statements in the Orthodox Creed of 1679. They did not hold with the independence of the local church or what today would be called local autonomy. The local churches were members of district associations which were linked together in the General Assembly which met annually except in times of severe persecution. Minutes of the General Assembly were preserved and were edited and published in two volumes by W.T. Whitley in 1909 and 1910. Problems arising in a local church which could not be resolved might be appealed to the association and on to the General Assembly. In a few instances the aggrieved party would present its case in successive years in hopes of being vindicated. Such was the case of Richard Haines (1633-1685), who obtained

a patent on the process of cleaning hop-clover, which he had invented. Because his pastor at Horsham, Matthew Caffyn, regarded all holders of patents as covetous, Haines was excommunicated. He then appealed to the General Assembly and after several years and much debate his excommunication was rescinded.¹¹

General Baptists recognized the following order of ministers: Messengers, Elders, and Deacons. An Elder was ordained to serve as the pastor of a local congregation and was normally expected to remain with his church for life unless he was removed for false doctrine or "for a sinful life." There were preachers other than elders who were called ministers; they too were tested and ordained but were not usually allowed to baptize or preside at the Lord's Supper, apparently because they were not pastors. Deacons were chosen by the local church and ordained for the purpose of caring for the poor and indigent. The office of Messenger was created for a special purpose. They were usually chosen by an association and ordained by the laying on of hands after a period of fasting and prayer. They were given the oversight of the churches which had elected them but their first responsibility was to preach the gospel to the world or unbelievers through a traveling ministry, to plant churches and settle them in the faith. They also ordained elders in churches newly planted as well as other messengers.¹²

Perhaps the best known among those who held this office was Thomas Grantham of Lincolnshire ordained as a Messenger in 1666. He organized churches in his native county, at Norwich, and elsewhere in the county of Norfolk. He is perhaps best known for his writings, including his *Christianismus Primitivus*, in which he set forth in great detail his views on the doctrines and polity of General Baptists. This and other works published by him earned him a reputation as the principal theologian of the denomination. To the Calvinists of Norwich who opposed him, he once said, "Seeing you think that Christ died but for some only, show me sufficient testimony from scripture that he died for yourself; and name one (if you can) now living in this great city, for whom

Christ died not."¹³ Grantham delighted in controversies with other Protestants and was involved in a number of public disputations. Because of his outspoken manner, he was sent to prison several times during the reigns of Charles II and James II.

The English General Baptists observed certain practices which were not necessarily unique to them. One of these was the imposition of hands on newly baptized persons. Although the laying on of hands has been practiced by certain other Baptist groups, most English General Baptists seem to have embraced the custom by the 1670's. Thomas Grantham commended it in his *Christianismus Primitivus* (1678) as a means of grace that signifies the gift of the Holy Spirit. The orthodox Creed of 1679 in Article XXXII, "Of Prayer, with laying on of Hands," states that

"Prayer, with imposition of hands by the bishop, or elder, on baptized believers, as such, for the reception of the holy promised spirit of Christ, we believe is a principle of Christ's doctrine, and ought to be practiced and submitted to by every baptized believer in order to receive the promised spirit of the father and son."¹⁴

Those who endorsed the six principles found in Hebrews 6:1-2 could not ignore the fourth one which was "the laying on of hands." Later on this practice was observed by Arminian Baptists in America, including General Baptists who settled in North Carolina.

Another practice which was almost universal among General Baptists was that of washing the feet of the saints.¹⁵ John Smyth had described it as part of the ministry of deacons and later General Baptists taught that it is commanded and blest by Christ and when performed decently and in order it produced affections among the brethren.¹⁶ Most General Baptists continued the practice, even regarding it as an ordinance, but did not insist that it was a requirement for church membership.

Anointing the sick with oil, accompanied by prayer, as commended in the Epistle of James 5:14-15, also became a

common practice among General Baptists. It had been practiced in the early church and came to be regarded as a sacrament (Extreme Unction) in medieval times. Perhaps for this reason most Protestants abandoned the practice, but smaller sects and individuals preserved its use because of its being sanctioned in the New Testament (Mark 6:13 and James 5:14). Although these practices—laying on of hands, washing the saints's feet, and anointing the sick with oil—were occasionally subjects of controversy among General Baptists in seventeenth century England, they were never made a condition of fellowship.

Chapter II

Beginnings in North Carolina and Virginia

The earliest settlers in North Carolina migrated from Virginia into the northeastern part of what was to become North Carolina, the region known as the Albemarle. As early as 1653 some settlers in Virginia were being encouraged to settle land south of the Chowan River so that by 1663 there were several hundred inhabitants living in the Albemarle region, which at that time was claimed by the colony of Virginia. In 1663 the entire area of what is now North and South Carolina was granted to eight Lords Proprietors, men who were favored by Charles II, King of England (1660-1685), because of their high positions and their support of the Crown.

Many of those who chose to settle in the Albemarle region were Dissenters, people who found it difficult to live under the laws of Virginia, which required conformity to the Church of England. Since no effort was made to identify these settlers by their religious affiliation, we are unable to say when the earliest Baptists arrived, but some surely settled there before 1700. The first charter of Carolina, issued in 1663, acknowledged that some of those who chose to settle in the province might not conform to the liturgy and ceremonies of the Church of England; therefore, the Proprietors were given liberty to grant to these persons "such indulgences and dispensations ... as they in their discretion think fit and reasonable" This statement in the charter would have given some encouragement to Dissenters, including Baptists, to seek a new home in the province of Carolina. In England during this period all persons were subject to fines and imprisonment if they violated laws aimed at suppressing dissent from the Established Church (The Clarendon Code). One such law, the Conventicle Act of 1664, forbade the gathering of five or more dissenting persons other than members of a single family for the purpose of worship.

The Act of Toleration, passed by Parliament in 1689,

removed many of the restrictions on Dissenters in England, but it was not always honored in the colonies, where Baptists continued to suffer the deprivation of their right of freedom of worship in colonies like Virginia, where the Anglican Church was the Established Church. As early as 1682 the Lords Proprietors ordered the publication of pamphlets in England, advertising the attractiveness of Carolina as a land rich in natural resources and a healthy climate as well as a place honoring religious freedom.

Despite the glowing descriptions of life in Carolina which appeared in print and liberal land grants offered by the Proprietors, the growth of the colony in the early decades of its history was slow. By 1700 there were only 5000 people living in the Albemarle region. North and South Carolina were separated in 1712, and by this date the population of North Carolina numbered less than 10,000. In 1729, which marked the end of the proprietary period, the population of North Carolina had reached 30,000. Compared to the colonies farther north, settlement in North Carolina was proceeding at a slower pace. One reason for this was that trade was hindered due to the shallow inlets, sounds, and rivers along the coast, which prevented larger vessels from entering the harbors. As a result towns were slow in developing. The first town to be chartered was Bath in 1708; New Bern was founded in 1710, followed by Edenton in 1715 and Brunswick in 1723.

The Society of Friends or Quakers were the largest single religious group in North Carolina during the proprietary period. As early as 1678 they established a monthly meeting in Perquimans Precinct and in subsequent years their numbers and influence were sufficient to exert considerable powers in electing members to the colonial legislature. In 1694 John Archdale, a convert to Quakerism and one of the Lords Proprietors, became governor of the colony. With the help of other dissenters Quakers provided leadership in the cause of preventing the establishment of the Church of England in North Carolina until 1715 when the Assembly passed a Vestry Act which created nine parishes in the colony. This Act was accompanied by another which allowed

Quakers, who refused to take oaths, the right of affirmation and gave to all Dissenters legal protection under the law.

Morgan Edwards, a Welch native who came to Philadelphia to serve as pastor of a Baptist congregation and who toured the southern colonies in 1771-72 in the interest of writing a history of Baptists in the colonies, says that there were Baptists in North Carolina as early as 1695. Although he gives no evidence to support this claim, it is reasonable to assume that among the estimated five thousand who had settled in the Albemarle region of Carolina by 1700 there were many who held Baptist views. The fact that Quakers were the largest single religious body at the turn of the century makes it clear that this region was a haven for those seeking freedom of religious expression.

One of those early settlers in Albemarle who may have been attracted by the prospect of acquiring modest wealth as well as freedom of worship was Benjamin Laker, who in 1664 was a resident of Betchworth Parish in Surrey County, England.¹ Laker may have come under the influence of Matthew Caffyn, a General Baptist pastor at Horsham, who gathered and settled other congregations in Surrey and Sussex counties during the 1650's and who was one of the signers of the Confession of 1660, presented to Charles II in the same year. The confession was reaffirmed in 1663, and soon thereafter Laker added his name to the list of the earlier signatories. Since Dissenters of all types suffered indignities and repression under the parliamentary acts known as the Clarendon Code, it is safe to assume that Laker would have felt the pressure of the Conventicle Act even though no record of his arrest for violation of this law is known to us.

The approximate date of Laker's conversion to General Baptist views may be indicated by the fact that after the birth of his second child, Benjamin, who was christened in June 1665, Laker withheld from infant baptism each of the six remaining children who were born to his first wife, Elizabeth. This decision was initially made prior to the birth of his third child, Mary, who was born on May 5, 1667.²

The fact that in 1682 the Lords Proprietors published a

number of promotional pamphlets for the purpose of giving widespread assurances of religious freedom in Carolina and that one of these pamphlets was published by the General Baptist printer, Francis Smith, who had printed numerous tracts, pamphlets, and sermons on behalf of General Baptists, including the Confession of 1660, may have brought to Benjamin Laker the idea of emigrating to Carolina.

It was on June 30, 1684 that Laker left England with his family aboard a ship bound for Carolina. Upon his arrival he purchased 400 acres of land from Richard Bentley on Albemarle Sound in Perquimans Precinct. There he settled with his wife, Elizabeth, and six children and began the life of a planter, along with a white laborer and a few slaves. His situation was not unlike that of many others who settled around Albemarle Sound.

Within a few years Laker's wife, a son, and three daughters had died but a surviving daughter, Sarah, was married to Thomas Harvey in 1688, then a member of the governor's Council and later appointed as deputy governor for the years 1694 to 1699. Meanwhile Laker's reputation was enhanced by his being made a commissioner of the peace for Perquimans Precinct. In 1690 the governor granted him a deputation to represent one of the Lords Proprietors, which in turn gave him a seat on the governor's Council. Laker also served as one of the judges in the high court of justice from 1691 through 1696. In 1697 he relinquished his place on the Council and spent the remainder of his life engaged in the work of a gentleman planter.³

There is little evidence in the extant records that Benjamin Laker was active as a General Baptist during his residence in Albemarle. That he was the only resident of Perquimans Precinct familiar with the General Baptist heritage is unlikely. That Laker himself was deeply interested in that heritage is evident from his will, which listed certain books as the first items he bequeathed to his heirs. To his daughter, Sarah Harvey, he left his copy of Thomas Grantham's monumental volume entitled *Christianismus Primitivus*, which dealt with General Baptist doctrine and polity. Thomas Grantham was the best known theologian and spokesman

among English General Baptists in the generation following the restoration of King Charles II. It is likely that Laker's copy of this important work had been in his possession since before he left England and that he considered it a valuable treasure to be passed on to future generations. To George Blighton of Martins Brandon Parish in Prince George County, Virginia, the husband of his daughter Lydia, Laker bequeathed a copy of the *Exposition of the First Five Books of Moses*. Blighton may have been associated with Baptists living in Prince George County.

Following Laker's death we find that a group of Baptists living in Carolina decided to write a letter to their brethren in Staffordshire, England, stating their desire to be supplied with a ministry or books. The contents of this letter implies that a group of believers were gathered who felt the need of a spiritual leader or printed materials to guide them in the ordering of their lives in an untamed wilderness. Could it have been the loss of Benjamin Laker as a stable leader among them which prompted them to appeal to their friends in England? There was no Baptist minister in Albemarle or in neighboring Virginia to whom they could turn. Their request was taken before the annual meeting of the General Association of General Baptists held in Whites Alley Church, Morefields, London on June 3-5, 1702. This association had earlier severed its relations with the main body, the General Assembly, over a doctrinal issue concerning the Person of Christ. After discussing the request, the Association took the following action which was recorded in their minutes:

Whereas our brethren of the Baptist persuasion and of the general faith who have their abode in Carolina have desired to supply them with a ministry or with books, we being not able at present to do the former have collected the sum of seven pounds twelve shillings wch wth wt can be further obtained we have put in the hands of our Bror. S. Keeling to supply ym with ye latter and yt ye said Bror. Keeling doe wright a letter to them in the name of this assembly.⁴

We have no record of the organization of a church resulting from these contacts between General Baptists in England and their brethren in North Carolina. It should be remembered, however, that in such situations in the absence of ministerial leadership Baptists would meet for worship in private homes rather than houses erected for worship. In Carolina there would be no legal restriction against such meetings at this time. As indicated above the Quakers were the most numerous religious body in the region and there were other Dissenters, including Presbyterians and Baptists who had settled in Albemarle, though the Quakers were the only organized church group as early as 1700. There were too few Anglicans to assert their influence toward gaining an establishment. The governor somehow secured the passage of a Vestry Act in 1701 providing for the laying out of parishes but it was later rejected by the Proprietors.

Thus, meetings of Baptists for worship could have been held over a period of several years without any formal organization of a church, especially in the absence of an ordained minister. Henry Sater, an English General Baptist who first settled in Virginia and later in Baltimore County, Maryland, invited Baptist ministers to preach in his house for several years before a church was formally established in 1742. One of the ministers who is said to have preached there and baptized nine persons was Paul Palmer.⁵ Since there were no Baptist ministers among the settlers in North Carolina, they would simply continue to hold meetings for worship until one having the requisite qualifications should appear. At that time there was no known precedent among English General Baptists for sending men to the colonies or anywhere else abroad for the purpose of evangelizing and settling churches. The Church of England had launched the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts in 1701 and missionaries were sent out to the colonies soon thereafter. Within a few years General Baptists would see the need to send men across the Atlantic to engage in settling churches among their brethren in the southern colonies.

Early General Baptists in Virginia

The earliest Baptist church in Virginia was established in 1714 at a place called Burley in Isle of Wight County south of the James River in southeast Virginia. This congregation had its beginning as a result of an appeal which a small group of Baptists who had settled in the area had made to the Kent Association of General Baptists south of London, England, which in turn sent out missionaries to Virginia.

In 1708 and the following years a dozen or more churches in Kent and Sussex Counties sent their representatives to the annual meetings of the Kent Association.⁶ Although they were busy discussing the recent rupture in the General Assembly over the doctrinal issue raised by Matthew Caffyn, who espoused a peculiar notion concerning the Person of Christ, they decided not to support the General Assembly in its attempts to define the doctrine of the Person of Christ but instead would adhere to the Confession of 1660 and decline to explain it further.

The Kent Association was not so deeply involved in the controversy which had divided the denomination that it could not give attention to preaching the gospel and planting churches in new areas. In 1711 five Messengers were nominated, men whose duties included evangelizing new areas as well as the oversight of the churches which had chosen them for that office. The following year the association agreed to choose as many Messengers as it could conveniently place in service. Six new candidates were chosen, and it was agreed that while their work lay chiefly among the churches choosing them, they were at liberty to go if either called or sent to some other locality. Probably none of them had as yet conceived of the idea of crossing the Atlantic to settle churches in one of the colonies. Then in 1714 we are informed that two Messengers were dispatched to Virginia: Robert Norden of Warbleton in Sussex and Thomas White of Sevenoaks, not far from London. In the same year the General Assembly, at its meeting in Glasshouse Yard Church, Goswell Street, London on May 19 approved the appointment of Norden and White to go to

Virginia and agreed to encourage support for their mission. In a separate motion they declared that "the persons appointed to go to Virginia go with all convenient speed," implying a note of urgency in their actions. The fact that this decision was made within a short period of time and with a sense of urgency suggests that both the Kent Association and the General Assembly were responding to a request from Baptist settlers in Virginia who needed a ministry, just as Baptists in North Carolina had earlier appealed to their brethren in Staffordshire for a ministry or books. This decision to send Norden and White as Messengers to Virginia resulted in the organization of the earliest Baptist Church in Virginia.

Thomas White is reported to have died on the voyage to Virginia, but Norden arrived and soon thereafter gathered a church at a place called Burley in Isle of Wight county. Interest in the Virginia mission was heightened by the excitement of these developments. Then in 1715 the Kent Association chose three more Messengers to go to Virginia, one of whom was William Wood of Lewes, who returned to England after a brief period and settled at Ditchling in Sussex, where there was a Baptist Church. His early return raised questions among some of the brethren since part of his travel expenses had been paid for out of association funds. The other two Messengers chosen to go that year were Thomas Harrison and Thomas Bengé but apparently they did not make the journey because of insufficient funds collected. Interest in the Virginia mission remained high, but the effort was crippled to some extent by the lack of financial support from the churches. Nevertheless, enthusiasm was higher in 1717 when five more churches were represented at the annual meeting of the association and a total of sixty-five pounds was raised for the support of the Messengers. During the following year there was a determined effort to create more interest in the mission and to raise money for its support through personal visits to the churches. The fact that a total of two hundred pounds was collected demonstrates the zeal with which these General Baptists, most of whom were poor by our standards, undertook to provide support for those whose tasks

included preaching the gospel in new areas.

There were occasional contacts between leaders of the association and Robert Norden in Virginia, who expressed a desire to return to England in 1718. The association considered his request and agreed that he should return if someone could be found to replace him. Their search for a suitable replacement, however, was without success, even though William Wood was chosen to go. At the next annual meeting Wood pleaded ill health as the reason for his failure to undertake the journey.

It should be remembered that Messengers of the Kent Association in the past had seldom traveled great distances beyond the boundaries of Kent and Sussex counties to preach the gospel. A decision to cross the Atlantic, a journey that could take weeks and involved great risks, was not to be taken lightly, even if one was prepared to settle in one of the colonies. Few, if any, of these men were thinking of finding a permanent home in Virginia if for no other reason than the fact that they were considered emissaries of the churches which had chosen them.

Aside from the church at Burley there were two other churches established as a result of the Virginia mission, one in Surrey County, west of Isle of Wight, and another farther westward in Prince George County. The churches in Isle of Wight and Surrey are mentioned by Paul Palmer in a letter written in 1729 to Rev. John Comer, a General Baptist minister in Newport, Rhode Island. The letter, which was entered in Comer's diary, reads, "There is a comely little church in the Isle of Wight county, of about thirty or forty members, the elder of which is one Richard Jones, a very sensible old gentleman, whom I have great love for. We see each other at every yearly meeting and sometimes more often. There is another church in Surrey County, where my brother Jones lives, I suppose of about thirty more."⁷ Richard Jones and Casper Mintz, both Baptist elders, are said to have come from England in 1727, apparently not sent expressly from the General Assembly of General Baptists. Jones became the pastor of the church at Burley and may have provided pastoral oversight for the one in Surrey County. We find the names of Casper Mintz

and Richard Jones at the head of a list of members in a letter written from the church at Burley in 1756 appealing to the Philadelphia Baptist Association for help in ordering their affairs.⁸

Evidence concerning the origin of the church in Prince George County was brought to light by Clarence H. Urner, who investigated the records of that county and published his findings in the *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* in April, 1933. The records show that Robert Norden had traveled west to Prince George County and had identified one or more Baptist families in whose homes he could hold religious services. He also appeared before the court in that county on June 14, 1715, for the purpose of obtaining a license to preach as a dissenting minister. The court record stated that:

Robert Norden an Annabaptist preacher appears in Court and takes the Oaths and Subscribes the Declarations mentioned in the Act of Parliament of the 1st of William & Mary & Entitled an Act for Exempting their Majesty's Protest Subjects Dissenting from the Church of England from the penaltys of Certain Laws. Order the sd Declarations be recorded.

I Robert Norden do Sincerely promise and Solemnly Declare before God and the World that I will be true and faithful to His Majesty King George, and I do Solemnly promise and Declare that I do from my heart abhor, detest and renounce, as Impious and Hereticall that Damnable Doctrine and Position that Princes Excommunicated or Deprived by the Pope or any Authority of the See of Rome may be Deposed or Murthered by their Subjects or any other whatsoever, and I do Declare that no foreign Prince, Person, Prelate, State Superiority, Preheminence or Authority, Ecclesiastical or Spiritual within this Realm. Robert Norden.

I, Robert Norden Profess faith in God the Father and in Jesus Christ his Eternall Sonn the true God and in the

Holy Spirit, One God Blessed for ever more, and I do acknowledge the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament to be given by Divine Inspiration. Robert Norden⁹

On the same date the home of Matthew Marks was registered in court as "a public meeting house for those persons called Annabaptists." Again, on July 12, 1715, Nicholas Robertson petitioned the court to register his house as "a public meeting house for the Sext of Annabaptists."¹⁰ Since we do not know the location of these two homes, we can only assume that they served as alternate meeting places for the General Baptists in Prince George County.

It appears that the church in Prince George County continued at least until the death of Robert Norden in 1725, for on August 15, 1719, Matthew Marks provided in his will that two hundred acres of land be given to his son, Edward Marks, upon his reaching the age of twenty-one and that he not prohibit the meetings held there. These words were added also: "... 'tis my Will Robert Norden have the plantation I Live in, till Edward Marks comes of age, with the land belonging to it."¹¹ Thus Norden was made guardian of Marks' plantation until Edward reached the age of twenty-one.

In 1724 Robert Norden wrote to the General Assembly in England to request that body to consider the advisability of his returning to England. No action was taken on his request that year but the following year the assembly agreed to bring him "Home from Virginia if he be Disposed to Return," and appointed Henry Miller and Robert Messers, both Messengers, to take whatever action they deemed necessary and to call on the churches for assistance as they thought proper. Norden, however, died at his post that same year. On October 7, 1726, an inventory and appraisal was made of his estate.

In view of the speculation that Paul Palmer whose work will be treated in the next chapter, came to America directly from England, W. T. Whitley, the English Baptist historian, notes that

there was a Palmer family of General Baptists living on the border of Surrey and Sussex counties and offers the suggestion that the report of Norden's death in England might have been the occasion for Paul Palmer to go and take up the work in North Carolina. But the evidence brought to light in recent years does not support this theory of Palmer's early years.

There is a connection between the Virginia churches settled by Robert Norden and the work of Paul Palmer in North Carolina. As noted above, Palmer mentions the churches in Isle of Wight and Surrey as well as Elder Richard Jones, whom he described as "a very sensible old gentleman whom I have great love for" in a letter to Rev. John Comer, written in 1729. He also mentions a yearly meeting of these churches which likely also included the two churches settled by Palmer as of this date. Apparently Palmer attended these meetings as well as making visits to the churches across the border in Virginia.

In his account of Baptists in Virginia Morgan Edwards reports that the church at Burley was dissolved after forty or fifty years, partly by sickness and partly by the removal of families to North Carolina.¹² Those families that removed to North Carolina settled on Kehukee Creek in Halifax County, near what is today the town of Scotland Neck. As early as 1725 there was a John Surginer at Kehukee who received a headright grant of 350 acres on Kehukee Swamp "for the Importation of one person for every fifty acres."¹³ William Surginer was there by 1729 when at age twenty-two he purchased fifty acres in a deed witnessed by Robert Surginer. On the same day Robert purchased fifty adjoining acres from the same land owner (John Nairne) in a deed witnessed by William Surginer.¹⁴ The latter is without doubt the William Sojourner (pronounced Surginer) who is credited by Morgan Edwards with the Kehukee Church in 1742. It appears therefore that the migration of General Baptist families from Isle of Wight County in Virginia to North Carolina was earlier and more gradual than is implied in Morgan Edwards' account. It must be remembered that migration from Virginia into North Carolina had been going on for several decades prior to 1742, the date given by

Edwards for the organization of the Kehukee Church.

Morgan Edwards mentions another General Baptist leader, Josiah Hart, who labored with William Surginer in the conversion of several men who were destined to play a role as General Baptist leaders. One of them, John Moore, became pastor of the church at Tar River Falls, a branch of the Kehukee Church, organized around 1744. Two men, Thomas Pope and William Walker, were active leaders in a church on Upper Fishing Creek organized in 1745, while Edward Brown is credited with establishing a church at Great Cohara in 1749. These men and the churches with which they were associated later submitted to the influence of Particular Baptist doctrine and thus were lost to the General Baptist movement in the 1750's. Neither the churches in Virginia nor those which sprang up in North Carolina as a direct result of the labors of William Surginer and his converts were to continue as General Baptist churches following the incursion of Particular Baptist teaching on the doctrine of salvation. This development will be treated in a subsequent chapter.

Chapter III

Early General Baptist Leaders

The role of early leaders in any religious movement is generally regarded as supremely important in that they prepare the way for others to follow. Although the General Baptist movement in England was about one hundred years old when it began to put down roots in North Carolina, it had to make a new beginning here because of the rather primitive conditions among those who chose to settle in the coastal plain of this state. Without bold leadership the General Baptist message might not have been carried from hamlet to hamlet and thus would not have left its imprint on the religious life of this state and especially on those people who came to be known as Original Free Will Baptists. It is fitting, therefore, that we should give some account of those early leaders in North Carolina who were called to preach the gospel and to gather congregations and settle them after the model of English General Baptists.

The Contribution of Paul Palmer to General Baptists

Until recent years very little was known about Paul Palmer, who is regarded as a pioneer of the General Baptist movement in North Carolina and an important figure in the history of the Original Free Will Baptist church. Historians were until recently dependent on the comments in Morgan Edwards' account of his background and his activities as a General Baptist preacher, together with references in the *Colonial Records* of North Carolina. The absence of information about his background led to speculation as to his origin and early life. As noted above, W. T. Whitley suggested that he came directly from England to take up the work begun by Robert Norden. The statement by Morgan Edwards that he was a native of Maryland, baptized by Owen Thomas at Welsh Tract in 1732 and ordained in Connecticut has been repeated again and again by Baptist historians until this

explanation of his early life was assumed to be correct. But this information cannot be reconciled with the evidence which has been uncovered by George Stevenson, Private Manuscripts Archivist of the North Carolina State Archives in Raleigh.¹ Morgan Edwards, who toured the colonies in 1771-72 for the purpose of gathering materials toward a history of Baptists in America, was dependent upon oral reports some thirty years after Palmer's ministerial labors and his sources were Particular Baptists who had little sympathy with the movement of which Palmer was a leading representative and who had only faded memories of his activities. Edwards did not visit the churches that grew out of Palmer's ministry nor did he interview Joseph Parker, an able General Baptist minister who could have given him a more accurate account of Palmer's life.

The earliest known contemporary reference to Palmer is found in the records of York County, Virginia. There in 1717 he married Martha Hansford Hill, a widow and mother of two small children, who died during the first year of their marriage. Property disputes with two brothers-in-law and lawsuits brought by his creditors prompted him to leave Virginia for North Carolina. By 1719 he had settled in Perquimans Precinct and had married Johanna Taylor Jeffreys Peterson, a stepdaughter of Benjamin Laker. She had been twice widowed and had acquired modest wealth, mainly in the form of real property which she had inherited. Her later husband, Thomas Peterson, who died in 1714, was a member of the governor's Council and one of the most prominent men in Chowan Precinct, where he was vestryman and church warden and had charge of the standards of weights and measures in St. Paul's Parish.

As a result of an incident which occurred on April 3, 1720, involving Palmer's slave named Cush, who was accused of going to a neighbor's plantation and carrying away a slave named Sambo along with his clothing and equipment and delivering the same to Palmer's place, the Palmers were brought into court on charges related to this incident. They were forced to defend themselves over a period of time in several sessions of the court. The case

was finally dismissed because the plaintiff failed to appear in court and establish its case.²

From 1719 to 1722 Palmer was affiliated with the Perquimans Monthly Meeting of Friends, but in July 1722 he requested a certificate of dismissal from the meeting without asking that the certificate be sent to another meeting.³ It is reasonable to assume that he had become familiar with General Baptist doctrines after his marriage to Johanna and was later persuaded to embrace them. Whether this came about through his reading books written by General Baptists, such as the one by Thomas Grantham mentioned in the will of Benjamin Laker or other volumes sent by English General Baptists in 1702 in response to a request for a ministry or books from their brethren in Carolina; or whether having learned about General Baptists from written sources, Palmer may have journeyed to Isle of Wight County where he became acquainted with either Robert Norden or Richard Jones, who succeeded Norden, we cannot say. Since there was no Baptist minister in North Carolina at this date, it is more logical to assume that he was baptized and ordained by one of the Baptist elders in Virginia than to suggest that this was the reason for his trip to New England in 1730 after he had been preaching and settling churches as early as 1727.⁴ He mentions the churches in Isle of Wight and Surrey counties as well as his great affection for Elder Richard Jones in a letter to John Comer written in 1729. If we could be certain that he had access to Thomas Grantham's *Christianismus Primitivus*, this would help to explain why he later spent so much time away from his home in Perquimans preaching his newfound faith, for Grantham was himself a General Baptist Messenger and his book was a full exposition of General Baptist faith and practice. It is of interest that the inventory of the Palmer plantation house made after the death of Palmer's daughter included a small library of about thirty books; however, we know neither the titles of these books nor how or from whom they had been acquired.⁵ Again, if he was familiar with the labors of Robert Norden and the fact that he had been sent by English General Baptists as a Messenger to Virginia, this would have inspired him

to undertake similar missions in places far beyond his home in Perquimans once he felt called to this task. Perhaps his attendance at the yearly meetings in Virginia would have stirred him to take up the task of preaching the gospel.

Palmer began his ministry in the precincts adjoining his home in Perquimans north of Albemarle sound. Baptist families had settled in this region as early as the late 1600's and some of them had likely been meeting for worship even though there is no reference to the existence of a Baptist Church prior to the beginning of Palmer's labors among General Baptists in this region. There was a group of families in Chowan precinct, north of the present town of Edenton, some of whom were Baptists, for the Anglican missionary John Urmstone complained of two Anabaptists serving on the vestry in St. Paul's Parish, Chowan Precinct, in 1714. Paul Palmer found in this neighborhood a welcome to his message and his ministrations, for near the present community known as Cisco he settled a congregation of General Baptists in 1727. Two years later this church wrote a letter to John Comer in Newport, Rhode Island, which is referred to in Comer's diary as follows:

This day I received a letter from ye Baptist Church in North Carolina, settled about two years (in ye year 1727) since, by Mr. Paul Palmer, signed by John Parker, John Jordan, Benjamin Evans, John Parker, John Brinkley, Michael Brinkley, Thomas Darker, James Copland, John Welch, Joseph Parke, William Copland, Joseph Parker. This church consists of 32 members, it meets at Chowan.⁶

George Washington Paschal has identified the location of this church in Chowan Precinct by means of the signatures to the letter, which are names of men whose activities are taken notice of in papers now found in the *Colonial Records* as well as other contemporary documents.⁷ John Parker, whose signature appears first, was probably a leader of the congregation and was likely the

man of the same name who was a justice of the peace of Chowan Precinct. John Jordan whose signature appears second on the list, was named a vestryman in the Vestry Act of 1715. Other names on the list are found on the Chowan Precinct jury lists of this period.⁸ Paschal also maintains that four of the signers of the letter to Comer owned adjoining tracts of land and that more than half of them were connected by family ties.⁹ Paul Palmer's signature does not appear among the list of signatures attached to this letter. This may indicate that he did not write the letter and therefore was not acting as their pastor. If more of the contents of the letter had been preserved, we could surmise the reasons why it was written. George Stevenson suggests that they may have written to Comer for help in finding a minister willing to be ordained to assume the care of the church.¹⁰ Apparently Palmer preached intermittently to this congregation, for the records of Chowan Precinct suggest that he made periodic visits to this area in subsequent years. The church built a meeting house sometime before 1733, for a Baptist meeting house is shown on Edward Moseley's map of North Carolina, which was sent to London to be engraved after the finished drawing was completed and was published in 1733.¹¹ It was located on the road which led north from Edenton toward Nansemond and Isle of Wight counties, Virginia. The map also shows an Anglican chapel in the same neighborhood.

Paschal supposes that this church did not continue very long and that Joseph Parker was its only local pastor. The importance of this church is that it was the first Baptist church of which we have any record in North Carolina. Parker is said to have moved to Meherrin about 1730 and to have organized a congregation there and built a meeting house by 1735 on land which he donated to the church. An account of Joseph Parker's ministry will be given later in this chapter.

The earliest Baptist church in North Carolina that has survived to the present day was also the result in part of Paul Palmer's labors in Pasquotank Precinct. The petition to the precinct court requesting the use of the home of William Burges as a meeting

house for worship is our earliest documentary evidence for this congregation, now known as Shiloh Baptist Church in Camden County. Such petitions were filed under the terms of the Toleration Act of 1689 by Dissenters seeking to comply with the Act. According to J.R.B. Hathaway, who found the petition and later established its date, the petition was filed on September 5, 1729, thus providing a date for the settling of this church. Since North Carolina became a royal colony in 1729, it is likely that the petitioners wanted to comply with the Act of Toleration in order to avoid any problem with the local precinct courts. The petition reads as follows:

North Carolina

To the Worshipful Court of Pascotank Precinct Now
Setting The Humble Petition of us the Subscribers
Humbly Sheweth That Whereas There is a Congregation
of the People Called Baptis Gathered In this Precinct
meeting for Religious Worship In ye Dwelling House of
William Burges on the North Side of Pascotank on the
head of Ramonds Creek, he ye said Burges having
granted ye same for use of ye said meeting we Pray ye
same may be recorded and we ye humble Petitioners in
duty bound should Pray

Wm Burges

Paul Palmer

Frances Brockit

Thomas Heonrton

William Jones

Philip Torksey

Robert Wasson

Charles Leutrough¹²

The fact that William Burges' signature appears first on the document may be explained by the fact that the church was meeting in his house. Morgan Edwards in his list of churches in the Kehukee Association, which was formed in 1769, designates

William Burges as the first pastor of this church. Clearly he provided leadership for the group which met in his home once Paul Palmer, whose name appears second on the list, had settled the church. We can surmise that Palmer laid hands on Burges and left the church in his care so that he could move on to other fields of labor.

The fact that this congregation, unlike the one in Chowan Precinct, had registered their meeting place in accordance with the stipulations of the Toleration Act would suggest that Palmer's work in Pasquotank had encountered opposition from supporters of the Established Church, making it necessary to appeal to the provisions of the Toleration Act for Dissenters. This would allow them to meet for worship without fear of threats or possible penalties imposed by the courts.

As stated above, the Chowan congregation had written a letter to John Comer in 1729 and Comer had noted the letter in his diary. During the first week in November 1729 Comer replied to this letter and soon afterwards opened a correspondence with Paul Palmer. He may have informed Palmer of recent events such as the yearly meeting of New England General Baptists which had convened at Newport earlier that year, attended by thirty-two elders, deacons, and delegates from fourteen churches. This could have planted in Palmer's mind a desire to visit New England to meet his brethren of like faith and perhaps learn from them more about his religious heritage as well as the best means of sharing his faith with others. It is doubtful that Palmer had enjoyed the benefit of formal education at the level of his fellow General Baptist ministers in New England, yet he was bold enough to prepare for publication a manuscript entitled "Christ the Predestinated and Elected," which he sent to Comer in March 1730. He also corresponded with Comer several times between December 1729 and March 1730.¹³

In the fall of 1730 Palmer decided to journey north by sea in order to make a personal tour of the General Baptist churches. Arriving in Boston, he visited churches in eastern Massachusetts and Connecticut before arranging to meet Comer at North Kings-

town in Rhode Island. He was unable to visit the churches at Newport because of a quarantine against visitors from Boston where there was an epidemic of smallpox. Comer wrote nothing in his diary concerning his conversation with Palmer, but the two men must have had important matters to discuss. Following his visit with Comer, Palmer traveled south to Piscataqua, New Jersey, where he spent some time with Rev. John Drake. While there the two of them ordained Henry Loveall to the ministry. Loveall had been recommended to Drake by Comer and other New England Baptists, but it was later discovered that prior to his conversion he had been a runaway indentured servant who had lived with another man's wife (presumably meaning that he had married a divorced woman whose husband was still alive).¹⁴ Palmer, Drake, Comer and others who had been associated with Loveall were later criticized for failure to properly investigate his background.

On his return trip to North Carolina Palmer traveled by land through Pennsylvania, Maryland and Virginia, stopping in Baltimore County, Maryland, where he preached at the home of Henry Sater, a Baptist layman, and either then or during a later visit baptized nine persons, according to Morgan Edwards. This congregation, which met for several years in Sater's home, was later organized in 1742 and is the oldest Baptist Church in Maryland. It was also known as Chestnut Ridge Church. Henry Loveall was to become the first regular pastor of this church.¹⁵

The date of Palmer's return to North Carolina is unknown. Not until 1734 is there further mention of him in contemporary records. In the summer of that year he and his wife executed a deed granting their real and personal property to their two children, Martha Ann and Samuel, aged fourteen and twelve.¹⁶ The fact that the records are silent does not mean that he was idle during those years. As early as 1729 before his trip to New England his preaching had gained the attention of Governor Everard, who wrote to the bishop of London on October 12, 1729, complaining of Palmer's success in gaining converts by the hundreds and acknowledging that he was powerless to prevent the

tide of enthusiasm which was sweeping over the Province.¹⁷ The failure of the Established Church (Anglican) to reach the thousands of new settlers along the coastal region of North Carolina and to provide a stable and continuing ministry for them meant that a wide door was open for Palmer with his message of general atonement and believers' baptism.

The message that Christ died for all mankind would appeal to many of these English settlers in the coastal region of North Carolina. Some of them would have heard that message in the old country and would have relished the opportunity to hear it again. Many others would have been more familiar with the Doctrine of Particular Election, which declared that God had chosen some out of the multitudes of sinful humanity and by implication had rejected others who were condemned to an eternity in hell. This latter view was the dominant one among English Protestants, especially those dissenting from the Church of England. Since Palmer was one of the few ministers in this period that many of the inhabitants in this province would have any opportunity to hear, they naturally welcomed his ministrations and hundreds of them must have been persuaded to receive baptism at his hands. In a few places he would be able to gather a small number into a church whenever he could find sufficient leaders to guide them. However, he must have preached and baptized in other places where his converts would be left without anyone to shepherd them. In such cases they would either wait until some minister came along to garner a harvest among them or else never be brought into the nurturing fellowship of a church. It seems that as long as he could, Palmer continued to visit these preaching places and to provide such teaching and encouragement as he was able for those who gathered to hear him.

Palmer traveled to Charleston, South Carolina, to attend a meeting of South Carolina Baptists, held on February 8 and 9, 1735.¹⁸ He had been invited to come by a small group of General Baptists who shared an endowed meeting house with a Calvinist majority. The invitation had been sent without the knowledge or consent of the Calvinist majority. Throughout the two day

meeting he was unable to speak from the pulpit because the Calvinists refused to yield to him an opportunity. Upset by the treatment Palmer had received, the General Baptists, whose families had provided much of the endowment for the church in Charleston, conferred with him as to the course they should take. He advised them to write to General Baptists in Rhode Island where there was "Great plenty of ministring brethren." Although they wrote to their brethren in Newport, asking for their assistance in obtaining a minister, no help was forthcoming from that quarter. In 1736 they were supplied with a minister from England, Elder Robert Ingram, who organized them into a church at Stono on November 25, 1736, according to Morgan Edwards.¹⁹ Later this church was under the leadership of Elder Henry Heywood who was sent by the General Assembly of General Baptists in England. He succeeded Ingram as pastor and continued to serve in this capacity until his death in 1755.

In August 1735 Palmer was again in Maryland, where in Somerset County he appeared in court and took the oaths required of dissenting ministers. He then proceeded to register six places where there were groups of Baptists meeting together for worship and instruction. He seems to have had a continuing interest in these Baptists in Maryland, for he later mentioned these same six sites by name in a request that two additional sites be registered as places of worship.²⁰ It may have been during this visit to Maryland in 1735 that he visited the General Baptist congregation which met in the home of Henry Sater, located in Baltimore County and which became known as Chestnut Ridge. According to Morgan Edwards this group of Baptists had earlier been served by George Eaglesfield, who was afterwards ordained as minister of the Baptist congregation at Middletown, New Jersey. Since Eaglesfield was not yet ordained while at Chestnut Ridge, he probably did not himself baptize any converts, but Paul Palmer was not under any such restraint and therefore is said to have baptized nine persons at this location either during this visit or earlier.

These visits to South Carolina and Maryland in 1735 were followed by further activity in the coastal area of North Carolina

during the next four years. Morgan Edwards mentions only one other church as having been gathered by Palmer in addition to the one in Chowan and the one in Pasquotank. Without any further description of the congregation, Edwards notes that "... Paul Palmer gathered a church at New River, in the borders of South Carolina."²¹ This location points to Onslow County rather than the South Carolina border. This is but another indication of the limited perspective that we are given of Palmer's career as a General Baptist minister by Morgan Edwards' comments, which are based on statements made by others about thirty years after Palmer's death. In fact these last years of Palmer's life reveal him as one who was deeply committed to his calling. His ministry was not limited to his home precinct (Perquimans) nor to the county where he had begun his evangelistic labors (Albemarle) but reached out to the area south of Albemarle Sound in what was then known as Bath County, formed in 1696, from which were later formed several other counties, including Beaufort (1712), Craven (1705), New Hanover (1729), Onslow (1734), and Bladen (1734). He preached and baptized throughout this area and is said to have gathered congregations or provided leadership to others who gathered congregations, including one drawn from Broad Creek, Flea Point, and Greens Creek in present Pamlico County, another from Goose Creek in Beaufort and Pamlico counties, another from Pungo River in Beaufort and Hyde counties, and yet another from Swift Creek in present Pitt and northern Craven counties.²²

In October 1738 Palmer decided to seek the protection provided by the Act of Toleration to dissenting ministers by applying to the General Court in Edenton, North Carolina, for license "to teach or preach in any part of the said Province" (North Carolina). This would make it unnecessary for him to appeal to any local court which had jurisdiction over the various places where he had established mission points or in any place to which he might be invited to preach. This decision to seek the broadest possible protection under the law would suggest that local authorities in sympathy with the Established Church threatened to curtail the activities of Palmer and his converts.

It seems that the success of Palmer and others associated with him had aroused such opposition that by May 1739 critics in Craven were complaining that Francis Ayres and William Fulsher, both of whom were Baptists, were creating disturbances by their "misbehaving speeches."²³ Fulsher may by this time have become an ordained Baptist minister, for we later find his name on petitions in both Craven and Beaufort counties, seeking to register meeting places for Baptists. In June 1740 a petition was filed with the Craven County court to register a meeting place in Craven for Baptists. The names of John James, William Fulsher, Francis Ayres, Lemuel Harvey, Nicholas Purefoy, and John Brooks were on the petition as leaders and spokesmen of the congregation. Their petition was denied but at the next session of the court in September a new petition was filed with a slightly different set of names and this time it was granted after the petitioners took the oaths of allegiance and supremacy and the test oath, the latter showing that they rejected the doctrine of transubstantiation in regard to the elements of bread and wine in the Lord's Supper.²⁴

Paschal has identified this group of Baptists with the church at Swift Creek which was located a few miles from New Bern on a creek which flows into the Neuse River. Its beginning is attributed by Morgan Edwards to the preaching of William Burges who was pastor of the church in Pasquotank. Since Palmer and Burges had both been involved in the founding of the church in Pasquotank, it is not impossible that both of them had labored together in Craven. Palmer had purchased a lot in the town of New Bern in March 1738 and two lots in Edenton in April of the same year. He contracted to build two small houses of the same type construction in Edenton and at his plantation in Perquimans in April of that year and may have planned to build a similar structure in New Bern.²⁵ Such houses could serve as meeting places for Baptists as well as provide accommodations for itinerant ministers like himself.

Another group of Protestant Dissenters found it necessary to file a petition to the county court at Bath in June 1741 to have a house at Bay River registered as a place of worship. The court

had denied their petition despite the fact that English law and the laws of the province of North Carolina allowed them this privilege. They then decided to appeal directly to the Honorable John Montgomery, Chief Justice of the Province, complaining that they had been debarred from meeting together for want of a registered meeting house. The petition reads in part:

Therefore as Children to a father, for Relief so we come to your honour, humbly praying that your honour would be graciously pleased to treat our petition & grant us the house of Mr. Robert Spring & the house of Mr. Nathaniel Draper at Flea Point, formerly belonging to Mr. Amos Cutrel, that we may have the sd houses Registered for places of public Worship; it being a Reasonable request agreeable to the Laws of the Land.²⁶

The petition is dated April 25, 1742, and signed by no less than twenty-three men, including William Fulsher, George Graham, and Josiah Hart, as well as those named in the text of the petition itself. Josiah Hart was an itinerant minister who appears in several locations in the records of the province and probably, along with William Fulsher, played a leading role in gathering the church at Flea Point. George Graham was later chosen as the pastor of a General Baptist Church at Bear Creek, while Fulsher was pastor of the church at Pungo in Beaufort County in 1772. These names on the petition make it clear that the petitioners were General Baptists.

The records do not indicate that Paul Palmer was himself involved in the petitions submitted to the courts in Craven and Beaufort counties; nonetheless, he was preaching in this area just prior to these events and his converts were caught up in the conflict with local authorities who were attempting to limit their right to register meeting places for worship. It is significant that Palmer had so recently found it necessary to obtain a license to preach anywhere in the province and that soon afterwards these Baptist congregations in Craven and Beaufort counties are the only

ones in this period who seem to have had obstacles thrown in their way in their attempts to register their places of worship. It would seem that one result of Palmer's itinerant ministry, which was carried on by his Baptist converts and associates, was to stir up opposition among those who did not want to see this movement spread throughout the coastal area of North Carolina. Such opposition seems incredible in view of the fact that up to this time the great majority of the inhabitants of the province were all but destitute of any kind of religious instruction. Although the Quakers had been active in the Albemarle region in the early decades of the province, their presence was not felt in other areas until later and their influence in the politics of the province declined rapidly after 1715. The Church of England was the only other religious body to have any significant influence in the province before 1750 and by all accounts it had done little to win acceptance among the population. The only ministry which it had to offer the inhabitants of North Carolina up to this time was that provided by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, which was formed in 1698 and received a royal charter in 1701.

On November 24, 1739, Paul Palmer's son, Samuel, died at age 18 of unknown causes. Palmer himself preached the funeral sermon based on the text found in Proverbs, "I love them that love me; and those that seek me early shall find me."²⁷

It seems that Palmer made one last trip north along the Atlantic Coast of Maryland to Indian River (now located in Delaware) in the spring of 1740.²⁸ Upon learning that one of the congregations he had gathered there had progressed to the point of making plans to build a meeting house, he addressed a letter to the clerk of court for Somerset County, Maryland, before whom he had earlier appeared to request license to preach and teach the several congregations that had gathered to hear him, asking now that two additional places be registered. One of these was the half-acre of land at the Healing Spring on the west side of Swann Gut, where the church was to be built, and the other a private dwelling which may have already been in use by the congregation.

From Indian River Palmer again traveled to Baltimore

County, Maryland, to visit the congregation at Chestnut Ridge.²⁹ This time his preaching aroused opposition on the part of a local magistrate named William Young, a justice of the peace. On January 29, 1742, Palmer was summoned to appear at the March term of the Baltimore County court, but neither he nor the two men who had given surety of his appearance were present when the case was called. The six witnesses against him were then discharged.

These visits to places outside of North Carolina as well as his travels up and down the coastal area of the province where he had chosen to make his home suggests strongly that Palmer perceived his ministry as very much like that of the English General Baptist Messengers. If the volume written by Thomas Grantham which Benjamin Laker referred to in his will, or another copy of the same, had somehow fallen into Palmer's hands, it would lend credence to this suggestion. The possibility that Palmer either had been ordained by Robert Norden, a Messenger sent to Virginia, or had learned all about him from his contacts with the General Baptist churches in Virginia would further explain his desire to preach his message over a wide area rather than become a settled pastor. Of course, his recognition of the great need of reaching so many people who seldom had the opportunity to hear a minister of the gospel would have given him incentive to leave his home and family many times during his ministry of little more than fifteen years.

Following this last visit to Maryland there is no further mention of Palmer in the records. Under what circumstances he died we have no knowledge, nor do we know where he was buried. The fact that his wife purchased land in her own name in June 1743 suggests that he was no longer alive at that date. His widow, Johanna, died in 1747 at age sixty-one.³⁰

The view of Paul Palmer which was perpetrated by the Calvinist Baptist historian, Morgan Edwards, and later Baptist historians who were largely dependent on Edwards' characterization of him are not worthy of the man whose labors we have described above. "He was not so happy as to leave a good

character behind him," Edwards commented in a summary statement about Palmer. Such a comment betrays Edwards' own bias toward the man and the views he held concerning the doctrine of grace as reflected in the preaching of early General Baptists in North Carolina. Just how and why such an opinion of Paul Palmer was fostered by the generation of Particular Baptist preachers that succeeded him will be explained in a subsequent chapter. That he is regarded, on the other hand, as one of the founding fathers of Original Free Will Baptists will likewise be made clear.

The Contributions of William Surginer and Josiah Hart

As stated in Chapter Two, William Surginer was in North Carolina as early as 1729 when at age twenty-two he purchased fifty acres of land on Kehukee Swamp. Prior to that date John Surginer had received a headright grant of 350 acres "for the Importation of One person for every fifty Acres." It may be that William was one of those who came with John while still in his teens, having moved from Isle of Wight County, Virginia. It is clear, therefore, that William was in Halifax County long before 1742, the date given by historians for the removal of families from Burley, Virginia, as a result of "a wasting pestilential disease." By 1742 a church had been established at Kehukee and a meeting house had been built on land given by William Surginer, who was its first pastor.³¹

After settling at Kehukee the General Baptists there must have maintained contact with their friends at Burley and some of them, including William Surginer, likely attended the yearly meeting of the Virginia churches. At these meetings young Surginer was baptized and later ordained either by Richard Jones or by Paul Palmer or both.

Surginer's ministry during the late 1730's and 1740's was concentrated on the Roanoke River and farther south on the Tar River. In the late 1730's he was joined by a Baptist hatter named Constant 'Devotion who came from New England to North

Carolina and was with Paul Palmer in 1734. By 1739 Devotion was at Kehukee where he sat on a coroner's jury and in 1740 he purchased a tract of land on Kehukee Swamp adjoining the land belonging to John Surginer.³² Then in the summer of 1742 while visiting the community on lower Fishing Creek he died as a result of a fall from his mare. George Stevenson suggests that it is more than coincidence that this man, who visited John Comer on November 2, 1729, a few days after Comer had received the letter from the church in Chowan, later showed up in the company of Paul Palmer, was afterwards drawn to the area of Kehukee, and finally suffered a fatal accident in a community near the Tar River where a General Baptist church was established in 1748. One can only speculate as to what role Constant Devotion might have played in the work of William Surginer, but it seems possible that he provided some assistance in the gathering of four churches on the Roanoke and Tar Rivers—Kehukee (1742), Falls of Tar River (1744), Fishing Creek (1745) and Lower Fishing Creek (1748).

Another General Baptist who became an associate of Surginer was Josiah Hart, who was active in church planting in the early 1740's in Craven and Beaufort counties. In addition to his role in gathering the church at New Bern and one at Flea Point, he is credited by Morgan Edwards with gathering the church at Pungo in Beaufort County. Since this is the area where Paul Palmer was actively engaged as early as 1734, it is likely that Josiah Hart was a disciple of Palmer and that he continued to exert his influence in this area where Palmer had labored for some time after Palmer's death around 1742. He is said to have been a doctor of some kind, which, if it is true, would have enabled him to move about freely. Later we find him in the area of Edgecombe and Halifax counties where he became a co-laborer with William Surginer as early as 1747. Together these men, like Palmer, preached, baptized, and otherwise performed the work of General Baptist Messengers. They are credited by Morgan Edwards with ordaining several younger men, including John Moore, William Walker, Thomas Pope, Charles Daniel, and Edward Brown. After the death of Surginer on February 18, 1750, all of these men, one by

one, embraced Calvinist doctrines during the 1750's. They in turn used their influence to persuade the churches under their care to follow their lead in adopting Particular Baptist views on the doctrine of salvation and admission to membership in the churches. It seems that Josiah Hart could do little to stem the tide. From 1755 to 1757 he was in Tyrrell and Beaufort counties where he was involved in several concurrent suits which may have resulted from his inattention to business affairs while he was laboring among the churches in Halifax and Edgecombe counties. By the spring of 1758 Hart, too, was dead.³³ These were critical years for the General Baptist churches that had been nurtured by Surginer and Hart in their infancy. Now that these men were no longer present to offer counsel and encouragement to these new and growing congregations and their untried leaders, they were more easily persuaded by those who held the prevailing tenants of the Calvinist system. As we shall see in the next chapter, the young men who were ordained by Surginer and Hart were the first to be swept up by these new winds of doctrine and the churches along the Roanoke and Tar rivers were soon in turmoil as their leaders, with help from the Philadelphia Baptist Association, raised the question as to how one can have reason to believe that he/she belongs to the number of God's elect people.

The Contribution of Joseph Parker

Morgan Edwards gave scant attention to the role of Joseph Parker as one of the founders of the General Baptist churches. By the time that Edwards made his tour to the Baptist churches in North Carolina (1772-73), Joseph Parker was living in Dobbs County in the area where he had settled as early as 1757, having purchased 100 acres of land on Little Contentnea Creek in December 1756. Even though Parker was still engaged in gathering churches in Dobbs County and making occasional visits to places outside this area, Edwards seemed to be unaware of his activities. When Burkitt and Read prepared an account of the history of the Kehukee Association, published in 1803, they noted

that most of the churches which made up the association "were General Baptists, and held with the Arminian tenets" and that "the churches of this order were first gathered here by Elders Paul Palmer and Joseph Parker."³⁴ Perhaps they were more aware of the fact that Parker had been actively engaged in preaching and gathering churches for many years after he had settled in Dobbs County.

It was S. J. Wheeler in his *History of the Meherrin Church* who first stated that this Joseph Parker was a member of the church in Chowan which sent a letter to John Comer at Newport, Rhode Island, in 1729, though he mistakenly identified this church with the church in Pasquotank (now Camden) County which became known as Shiloh. Wheeler, who published this history of his home church in 1847, further stated that Parker had migrated westward to that part of Bertie County which became Hertford County and settled on land adjoining that on which the church now stands. After holding meetings for worship, possibly in his home, he is said to have built, with the help of his neighbors and friends, the first meeting house on land which he donated to the church.³⁵ Wheeler acknowledged that he had very little information about Joseph Parker's ministry at Meherrin even though he states that it was "confined, principally to the people in this immediate vicinity, until 1773, when he removed, according to tradition, 'South of the Tar River,' and there ended his earthly pilgrimage."³⁶ But he added to this the fact that Elder Parker again moved southward and settled in Lenoir County where "he and his wife lived in limited circumstances, supported by a few members of the Freewill Baptist church." He mentioned some of the places where Parker occasionally preached (Conetoe and Pungo) but insisted that his labors were largely confined to the church at Wheat Swamp.

George Washington Paschal in his *History of North Carolina Baptists*, Vol.I, leans heavily on Wheeler's account for his information concerning Joseph Parker, who is assumed to be the Joseph Parker whose name appears among the signatures on the letter from the church in Chowan to John Comer in 1729. Paschal suggests that Joseph Parker was not more than twenty-five years

of age, when he and his wife Sarah (daughter of John Welch, another member of Chowan congregation) moved to Meherrin in close proximity to the present town of Murfreesboro, North Carolina, sometime before 1735, the year that he and his neighbors erected a meeting house on land given by Parker himself. Paschal further identifies him as the son of a father having the same name.³⁷ He assumes, following Wheeler, that Joseph Parker was the first pastor of the Meherrin Church but acknowledges that little is known about his ministry beyond what Wheeler narrates concerning Parker's later years. He does state that Wheeler was mistaken about the date when Joseph Parker left Meherrin, and that as early as 1742 he petitioned for a grant of 200 acres of land in Edgecombe County.³⁸ From this he assumes that Parker left the church at Meherrin to the care of William Parker, moved to the new location, and by 1748 had established the church at Lower Fishing Creek, near Enfield. According to Morgan Edwards this church "had been a society belonging to Mr. Parker for about eight years and on the Arminian plan ...," but in 1756 it was formed into a church on the Calvinistic order.³⁹

It is perhaps significant that Burkitt and Read in their account of the churches which formed the Kehukee Association in 1769 do not refer to Joseph Parker as having been a pastor at Meherrin, nor do they say anything of his having founded the church. They do refer to William Parker who served as pastor until his death in 1794, after which the church became a Particular Baptist congregation with Lemuel Burkitt as its first pastor. They do say, however, that "Elders Joseph Parker, William Parker, Winfield and others frequently preached here."

Paschal's account of the early years of Joseph Parker may be a case of mistaken identity, according to George Stevenson. It seems that there was more than one Joseph Parker in the records of this period.⁴⁰ With some reluctance Stevenson rejects the long held tradition which identifies Joseph Parker, the General Baptist preacher by that name, with the church in Chowan or the founding of the church at Meherrin. Instead, he identifies our Joseph Parker as "the son of a prosperous planter named Francis Parker

and his wife Elizabeth who came with other families from Surry, Nansemond, and Isle of Wight counties, Virginia, through Bertie County into the Roanoke and Tar River valleys in North Carolina during the 1720's."⁴¹ This family of Parkers had settled on Deep Creek south of the Roanoke below Kehukee Swamp. In this location they were within the sphere of influence of William Surginer and those General Baptist families who came from Isle of Wight County to this same area. According to Stevenson, the family relocated farther south to Lower Fishing Creek, which flows into the Tar River, before 1735, at which time Joseph Parker held the office of constable of the district.

Just what religious convictions Parker may have had in his youth or how he came to embrace General Baptist views is unknown. He displayed an interest in religion as early as 1741 in that he purchased a New Testament from the estate of Henry West. Stevenson speculates that Constant Devotion, who had joined William Surginer at Kehukee in the late 1730's, may have played a role in Parker's conversion, for he was at Lower Fishing Creek in May 1742, where he witnessed two deeds made by Parker's father, Francis Parker.⁴² Devotion was still in the same area on June 8, 1742, when he was killed as a result of a fall from his mare. During the next few years Parker may have attended religious services occasionally at Kehukee where Surginer became the first pastor in 1742. Parker was at Kehukee in November 1745, where he witnessed a deed from William Surginer to William Andrews at this time.⁴³ Could it be that Surginer baptized Parker and launched him on his career as a General Baptist preacher just as he did other young men who came out of this church at Kehukee? Assuming that there were yearly meetings of General Baptist churches at this time,⁴⁴ Parker may have attended such meetings which would have provided him an opportunity to learn about the success of General Baptists in making new converts in scattered settlements of the coastal plain and gathering new churches where ministers could be found to lead them.

Josiah Hart, a disciple of Paul Palmer, was in the area of Lower Fishing Creek in 1747 and was actively involved in

preaching and baptizing here and at such places as Falls of Tar River, Toisnot, and Kehukee. Working together with Surginer, they were successful in gathering congregations and raising up young men who would become pastors and evangelists. The church called Lower Fishing Creek was formed in 1748 and Joseph Parker was chosen as pastor. Stevenson suggests that either Hart or Surginer was the presiding elder for the constitution of the church and the ordination of Parker.⁴⁵ Josiah Hart was again at Lower Fishing Creek in the Spring of 1749 when he baptized Charles Daniel and during another visit on August 16, 1753, he and Henry Ledbetter ordained the said Daniel as assistant to Joseph Parker.⁴⁶

During the ensuing years it seems that Parker must have journeyed south of the Tar River to the area of Dobbs County where he was later to settle and spend the greater part of his years as a General Baptist minister. There he would have found a General Baptist church at Stoney Creek in the northern part of present Wayne County, which had as pastor George Graham, who had likely been ordained by Paul Palmer. There was another to the east on Swift Creek in northwestern Craven County which had as pastor Joseph Willis, ordained by Graham and William Fulsher. Parker must have concluded that this area between the Tar and Neuse rivers was a promising field for his message of general atonement and believers baptism. Therefore, he negotiated a purchase of 100 acres located on the west bank of Little Contentnea Creek in the present Greene County. The land was deeded to him by Jacob Blount on December 25, 1756.⁴⁷ There he would make his home and gather his first church in the present Greene County which would become known as Little Creek Church. The present church building is located on that same tract just a few yards west of the creek from which it gets its name.

From this location Joseph Parker extended his influence into other areas of Dobbs County, in particular that part of Dobbs which became Lenoir County. There he would later establish branches of Little Creek Church at Wheat Swamp and at Louson Swamp. In time these would become local churches. At some

point during this period his ministry likely extended into neighboring Pitt County which resulted in the formation of Gum Swamp Church. Although Rufus K. Hearn implies that William Parker organized this church and that he traveled all the way from Meherrin near Murfreesboro to preach there on a regular basis it is more likely that Gum Swamp Church in Pitt County had its beginning as a result of the labors of Joseph Parker who was located only a few miles away at Little Creek. It seems that Hearn in his "Origin of the Free Will Baptists of North Carolina" at times confuses William Parker with Joseph Parker in his treatment of William Parker's role in the service of Gum Swamp Church.⁴⁸ Another church which may owe its beginning to Joseph Parker's ministry is Grimsley Church, located a few miles west of Little Creek. The fact that these churches in Greene and Pitt counties have survived to the present as Original Free Will Baptist churches is testimony to the importance of Joseph Parker as one of the "fathers" of the Free Will Baptist denomination. But even as Parker was engaged in preaching and planting new churches in Pitt and Dobbs counties, a movement was already underway which would sweep away most of the gains made by General Baptists since Paul Palmer began preaching the message of general atonement before 1727.

Chapter IV

The Reorganization Process

What occurred among the General Baptists in North Carolina in the 1750's can best be understood against a background sketch of what was happening on the larger scene of English and early American church history. The New England colonies, and to a lesser extent the Middle Atlantic colonies, had been settled by English Puritans during the seventeenth and well into the eighteenth century. The reigning theology, especially in New England, was a type of Calvinism which had been embraced by English Puritans as early as the sixteenth century when scores of English clergymen had fled England during the reign of Queen Mary in the 1550's. Many of them sought refuge in Geneva, Calvin's adopted home, where they learned the doctrines of predestination, election, irresistible grace, limited atonement, and final unconditional perseverance of the saints, doctrines identified with John Calvin. Following their return to England they sharpened their views on these doctrines in their struggles with English monarchs, including Elizabeth I, James I, and Charles I, who were also the recognized head of the Church of England. It was during the reign of Charles I that thousands of these Puritans left their English homeland and came to settle in the American wilderness. During the English civil war in the 1640's Puritanism finally triumphed in England but its victory was short lived. The restoration of Charles II in 1660 brought back the Church of England in much the same form as it had been in the reign of Elizabeth I (1558-1603). Dissenters of all kinds were forced to cooperate in their struggle against the monarchy and the Established Church (Anglican). The result was that English Particular Baptists adopted a confession of faith in 1677 which owed much to the Westminster Confession, the standard of orthodoxy for Presbyterians and, in slightly revised form, for Congregationalists. Particular Baptists who immigrated to America and settled in the Middle Atlantic colonies, especially around Philadelphia, later formed the Philadelphia Association in

1707. But it was not until 1742 that they adopted a revised form of the Particular Baptist Confession of 1677, which was thoroughly Calvinistic.

Meanwhile a religious phenomenon was occurring in the American colonies which became known as the Great Awakening. It began in the Ruritan Valley of New Jersey and spread throughout the Middle Atlantic and New England colonies. Prominent figures in the revivals of the 1730's and 1740's included Gilbert Tennent, Jonathan Edwards, and George Whitefield, all of whom were Calvinists. Thus the predominant influence of the Great Awakening was a reaffirmation of the Calvinist doctrinal system with its emphasis on divine sovereignty in electing some for salvation while leaving others to be content with the knowledge that their eternal damnation was justified.

It was this emphasis on the election of the saints by divine decree to the exclusion of the reprobate that provided the theological basis for the intervention on the part of the Philadelphia Baptist Association in the churches of the General Baptists in North Carolina. The salvation of the elect and the formation of true churches made up of the truly elect was their mission.

John Calvin had taught the doctrine of election but emphasized that only God knows who belongs to that number. Reformed theologians, especially among English Puritans, were not content with such a conclusion, for it made one inquire continuously, with an inward turning eye, whether or not one belonged to the elect. They therefore developed what has been called a "morphology of conversion" whereby one could be reasonably assured that he had been chosen by grace for salvation. The Puritan founders of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, for example, decided that a narrative of one's regenerating experience should be regarded as evidence that one is among God's elect and therefore a requirement for full church membership. Scores of Puritans have left vivid accounts of their conversion experience as testimony that they had been chosen by grace. Particular Baptists of the Philadelphia Association, who had long been influenced by Puritan theology and the belief that the local church should consist only of regenerate

members, could find themselves in full agreement with the leaders of the Great Awakening and likewise shared this Puritan ideal of religious conversion. An important feature of the revivals of the Great Awakening was the sometimes dramatic conversion of scores of people. Such conversions were described as the "experience of grace." Without it one could not be sure that he or she belonged to the elect of God. On the other hand, General Baptists, who believed that anyone who hears the gospel is capable by grace of responding in repentance and faith, had always required a simple profession of faith in Christ as the requisite for baptism and membership in the church, a view that is widely shared by most Baptists today.

Furthermore, General Baptists had always embraced a distinctly Arminian theology. The confessions of faith drawn up by John Smyth and Thomas Helwys as well as those confessions published by later General Baptists, including the Confession of 1660, included articles derived from the teachings of the Dutch theologian, Jacob Arminius. Like Arminius, these early General Baptists rejected the doctrines of predestination, limited atonement, and irresistible grace. Because the views attributed to Arminius were condemned by the Dutch Synod of Dort in 1618-19, they were considered unorthodox by Calvinist theologians in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Nevertheless, Arminianism gained favor at the highest levels of the Anglican church in the seventeenth century as a counter to Puritanism, and in the eighteenth century John Wesley, an Anglican clergyman, was one of the most ardent defenders of Arminian tenets. Because his views differed from those of his friend, George Whitefield, who had adopted a Calvinist theology during his first visit to America, there was a heated exchange of letters between them in 1740-41, centering on the Calvinist-Arminian controversy. They later decided not to make the issue a test of fellowship, but neither of them would abandon his position.

It should be pointed out that Wesley's Arminian views were not based on an optimism concerning human nature, a view that was gaining ground among enlightenment theologians at that time.

Wesley shared with other churchmen of his day a belief in original sin, in the inability of human beings to gain righteousness before God through works. He, like most Arminians, was as insistent as the Calvinists that salvation is a divine work and that humans can do nothing to become worthy of God's grace. His belief that Christ died for all humanity and not for a chosen number of the elect was grounded in his conviction concerning the boundless grace of God.

Because the more liberal theologians of the period of the Enlightenment in England were raising questions concerning such doctrines as predestination, original sin, and total depravity, their views were often characterized as "Arminian." Some of these views were beginning to take root in the Boston area of Massachusetts in the 1730's, prompting Jonathan Edwards to preach a series of sermons on the dangers of "Arminianism." Since Calvinism was the prevailing theology in New England and the Middle Atlantic colonies, any departure from it was likely to be termed "Arminianism." Those who sought to modify the traditional doctrines of total depravity, limited atonement, and unconditional election were likely to be lumped together and branded as "Arminian" by orthodox Calvinists.

In a pamphlet entitled, "What Is An Arminian?", John Wesley noted the bad connotation which this name had received among many churchmen of his day. Listing the errors with which those usually termed "Arminians" were charged by their opponents, he pleaded "not guilty" to the allegation that Arminians deny original sin and justification by faith. He then acknowledged as true the allegations that Arminians deny absolute predestination and irresistible grace and affirm that a believer may fall from grace.¹ Wesley's method of describing an Arminian was to distinguish him from a Calvinist; however, he appealed to his followers not to use the word *Calvinist* as a term of reproach and likewise called upon Calvinist spokesmen not to use the word *Arminian* in this manner.²

The Particular Baptist historians, who have provided our earliest accounts of the General Baptists in North Carolina, have

stated repeatedly that the latter embraced Arminian tenets. Morgan Edwards narrates how certain of the churches which he describes had formerly existed on the Arminian plan but that some members had embraced "the doctrines of grace" and thus had constituted Particular Baptist churches. Referring to the churches of the Kehukee Association, formed in 1769, Burkitt and Read stated that "the most of these churches, before they ever united in an association, were General Baptist, and held with the Arminian tenets." Apparently they felt that such a foundation warranted the dissolution of these churches so that they could be constituted on more solid grounds.

Thus the factors on the wider scene in colonial America which set the stage for the change that was to occur among the earliest Baptists in North Carolina were the swelling tide of Calvinist influence and the necessity of narrating a conversion experience which could be used as convincing evidence that one belonged to the number of God's elect. Both of these were given strong impetus by the revivals of the Great Awakening. That news of such revivals reached even the most remote communities of eastern North Carolina by 1750 is most probable. George Whitefield, the best known figure of the Awakening, had traveled by land through the coastal area of North Carolina and preached at New Bern while on his way to Georgia in 1739.

How the Reorganization Was Accomplished

Although the first Particular Baptist church was organized by representatives from the Philadelphia Association at Kehukee in 1755, the seeds for this event and subsequent reorganizations were sown a few years earlier. By 1750 there was evidence that some General Baptist ministers had been influenced by Calvinist teachings. According to Morgan Edwards, James Smart, who had been baptized by Josiah Hart and ordained on June 28, 1750, began to preach Calvinism by the end of that same year. He was followed by another ordained by Hart, Henry Ledbetter, whose preaching this new doctrine so offended his church that he was

persuaded to leave them and go to South Carolina. Then William Walker, who was also from Upper Fishing Creek, was convinced of the rightness of Calvinist dogmas, which prompted him to journey to Charleston where he could be further instructed in this new doctrine.

Just who was the source of this new influence on these young men that had so recently been ordained as General Baptists? Paschal held that it was primarily the proselyting zeal of Robert Williams, a native of Northampton County, who had gone to the Pee Dee in South Carolina in 1745 and had been well taught by the Welch Neck Baptists.³ Upon returning to North Carolina, he began to propagate his views, especially at Kehukee. There he succeeded in converting a layman named William Wallis, who also became a strong advocate of the new doctrine. Wallis in turn influenced others at Kehukee, including John Moore, who became pastor at Falls of Tar River when it was reconstituted as a Particular Baptist Church. Other young ministers from Kehukee who came under the same influence were Edward Brown, pastor at Cohara in the present Sampson County and Thomas Pope, pastor of the church at Kehukee. Some of these men may have been influenced by reading material which fell into their hands. For example, John Moore is said to have read Edward Fisher's *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*, a seventeenth-century Puritan work and Charles Daniel was finally persuaded after reading a collection of George Whitefield's sermons.

Morgan Edwards suggests that the situation among North Carolina Baptists must have been brought to the attention of the Philadelphia Baptist Association by Robert Williams since he was affiliated with Welch Neck Baptists who were in communication with that association. The first response of the association was to send John Gano, an able young Baptist minister who would later distinguish himself as an itinerant preacher. He was sent in October 1754 first to Charleston, South Carolina, to attend the Baptist Association there, and returning through eastern North Carolina, he had a meeting with General Baptist ministers, probably at Upper Fishing Creek (later called Reedy Creek) in

Warren County. A portion of that account is as follows:

On his arrival, he sent to the ministers, requesting an interview with them, which they declined, and appointed a meeting among themselves, to consult what to do. Mr. Gano, hearing of it, went to their meeting, and addressed them in words to this effect: 'I have desired a visit with you, which, as a brother and a stranger, I had a right to expect; but as ye have refused, I give up my claim and am come to pay you a visit.' With this he ascended into the pulpit, and read for his text the following words, 'Jesus I know, and Paul I know, but who are ye?' This text he managed in such a manner as to make some afraid of him, and others ashamed of their shyness. Many were convinced of their errors, touching faith and conversation and submitted to an examination.⁴

Just who was present at this meeting with John Gano is not reported by Edwards, nor is it clear why they were willing to grant him a hearing. One can only assume that they were intimidated by his presence and by his skill in presenting his views as well as his ability to make their views seem indefensible. Although Gano at the time was about twenty-seven years of age, some of these General Baptists were much younger and less experienced than he.

When the Philadelphia Association heard Gano's report of his southern tour and especially his encounter with the ministers in North Carolina, they decided to send two of their ablest ministers, Peter Peterson Vanhorn and Benjamin Miller, on a mission to rescue the elect from error among the General Baptists of North Carolina. There is no indication that their purpose was to evangelize the many unsaved people living in the coastal plain of this colony, for their efforts were concentrated on reconstituting churches consisting only of the elect as determined by their standards.

Miller and Vanhorn set out for North Carolina on October 28, 1755. According to Morgan Edwards, who is not always careful

about dates, they arrived at Kehukee where they began their reforming efforts and on December 11 they succeeded in transforming this church into a Particular Baptist congregation.⁵ How did they accomplish this? Since the pastor had already been persuaded to embrace Calvinism, their method was either to persuade the congregation to disband or simply to declare that the existing organization is not a true church, after which those who wished to present themselves for membership in the reconstituted church must submit to examination by the ministers to determine whether or not they could give satisfactory evidence of an "experience of grace." Those who could satisfy the ministers were then admitted to membership in the reconstituted church. That a similar test for membership was applied by the Particular Baptists of North Carolina in later years is evident from a statement describing the testimony which was expected of candidates for membership in the churches of the Kehukee Association. The person applying for church membership "... shall relate his experience, setting forth how the Lord awakened him, and brought him to a sense of his lost state by nature; how he had seen the insufficiency of his own works to save him: And how the Lord had revealed to him the way of life and salvation through Jesus Christ, and the reasons he has to believe that he is interested in this glorious plan: and the evidences that he has become a new creature."⁶

Once the elect were identified by examination of each individual who was willing to submit to such as examination by the ministers, they were then organized as a new church. One supposes that the members of the new church would also subscribe to the doctrines and church discipline of Particular Baptists as set forth in a church covenant like the one given in Paschal's account.⁷ This covenant bound the members to a rigid form of Calvinistic dogmas which included "all those principles and articles of doctrine and practice contained in the confession of faith adopted by the Baptist Association at Philadelphia anno Dom. 1742 and reprinted in 1743"⁸

From December 1755 through February 1756 Miller and

Vanhorn succeeded in reconstituting only four churches: Kehukee (Halifax County) - 10 members, Upper Fishing Creek (Warren County) - 13 members, Bear Creek (Lenoir County) - 15 members, and Swift Creek (Craven County) - 12 members. How many other churches they may have visited during this period we do not know. It is likely that they laid the ground work for other churches to follow suit. Even after their tour was concluded, defections of General Baptist churches continued under the leadership of the ministers who had earlier changed their sentiments. One by one these churches submitted to reorganization until as many as twelve had become Particular Baptist by 1761. In every case only a small number of the original membership of these churches were enrolled as members of the reconstituted churches. Paschal estimates on the basis of information derived from Edwards that no more than five percent of the original members were received into the newly formed churches.⁹ Clearly the laity in these churches were not very responsive to the methods and the views of the ministers who took the lead in bringing about these changes. They were reluctant to follow these men who were anxious to proselyte anyone whom they thought to be among the elect and to exclude all others from the new organization. Even Paschal, whose description of this process reveals an ambiguity concerning its effects, acknowledges that many of these lay persons in the General Baptist churches would have found the Calvinistic tenets advocated by their leaders somewhat bewildering and even repelling.¹⁰

In some cases there was open hostility on the part of the lay members to the fact that their church was being "dissolved" and replaced by a new organization of which they did not approve. Nevertheless, without pastors to lead them what remained of these General Baptist congregations would in time wither away. Even those who contested the ownership of their meeting houses, as at Toisnot in Edgecombe County, were not able to survive without pastoral leadership. Perhaps the greatest tragedy of the reorganization process was the loss of a generation of these General Baptist laity many of whom were lost to the church forever. Deprived of

their ministerial leadership, they were left as sheep without a shepherd. In many cases they lost their meeting houses, for the title to the church property, it seems, was regarded as vested in the minister.

A more lasting effect of the reorganization process was the heritage of distrust which developed between the remnant of General Baptists in North Carolina and the Particular or "Regular" Baptists as they came to be known. This would explain the short shrift given to the few remaining General Baptist churches by Morgan Edwards, writing about fifteen years after these events. Following a brief introductory note, he merely lists these churches and their ministers with no comment, beginning with Contantony (Contentnea or Little Creek) in his "Materials Toward a History of Baptists." A half century later Burkitt and Read practically ignore the early history of the churches belonging to the Kehukee Association which had formerly existed as General Baptist churches. They do acknowledge that these churches were first organized on "the Arminian plan," but display a decided bias against such a foundation. They further claimed that:

... several of those churches that at first belonged to the Kehukee Association, were gathered by the Free-will Baptists, and as their custom was to baptize any persons who were willing, whether they had an experience of grace or not, so in consequence of this practice, they had many members and several ministers in those churches who were baptized before they were converted; and after they were brought to a knowledge of the truth, and joined the Regulars, openly confessed they were baptized before they believed; and some of them said they did it in hope of getting to Heaven by it.¹¹

This kind of testimony was enough to convince later Baptist historians that the reorganization of these churches was justified because they included members who had not had a conversion experience prior to baptism. Therefore, these churches were in

error or irregular at best and this was due, in part at least, to their not possessing the truth as taught by Calvinist theologians.

It is amazing how later Baptist historians could be so forthright in passing judgment on these early General Baptists, even though they lack the kind of evidence to support their conclusions that would satisfy an impartial observer. David Benedict, whose work appeared in 1813, wrote:

... although some of their ministers were evangelical and pure, and the members regular and devout; yet on the whole, it appears to have been the most negligent and the least spiritual community of Baptists, which has arisen on the American continent. For so careless and indefinite were they in their requisitions, that many of their communicants were baptized and admitted into their churches; and even some of their ministers were introduced into their sacred functions, without an experimental acquaintance with the gospel, or without being required to possess it.¹²

As late as 1930 George Washington Paschal was repeating the same indictments concerning the lax discipline among these early General Baptists and comparing them unfavorably with the Particular Baptist churches which were meant to replace them. Admitting that there were members in some of these churches "whose holy lives must have profoundly influenced the community in which they lived," and that in some, like the one at Meherrin,

... the members doubtless came together for worship every week in the sweetest bonds of Christian unity and love; but these churches exercised a weaker influence on the morals of the people because they had in their membership many who were unconverted and whose lives were grossly immoral. The new churches were different; in their membership were only the elect; they were walking in a way in which only the redeemed of the

Lord walked; ...¹³

He went on to declare that "with the reformation from General to Particular Baptist churches came a new standard of church membership in North Carolina."¹⁴ This conclusion is based on his assumption that these new churches adhered carefully and precisely to the church discipline set forth in the church covenant, the text of which he then gives in full.¹⁵ Experience teaches however, that churches do not always adhere to the standards embodied in their creeds and church covenants. This appears to have happened even in the case of the churches of the Kehukee Association, for when the General Association of Separate Baptists in Virginia sent delegates to the Kehukee Association in 1773 in order to ascertain whether or not communion between the two groups was possible, the delegates from Virginia decided that they should refuse communion with the Regular Baptists. According to Burkitt and Read, the reasons they gave included the following:

1. The Regulars were not strict enough in receiving experiences when persons made application to their churches for baptism in order to become church members.
2. They refused communion with Regular Baptist churches, because they, i.e., the Separates, believed that faith in Christ Jesus was essential to qualify a person for baptism, yet many of the Regular churches had members in them who acknowledged they were baptized before they believed.¹⁶

The Remnant of General Baptists

Not all of the General Baptist ministers and churches submitted to the reorganization process. Just how they were able to withstand this invasion of the great majority of the churches and to counter the arguments of the emissaries of the Philadelphia

Association as well as the ministers who converted to this new doctrine we are unable to say. One thing is certain: those churches whose pastors remained true to their General Baptist heritage were not dissolved and replaced by Particular Baptist churches. Morgan Edwards names four churches and ministers which remained unconvinced by the advocates of Calvinist dogma. These were William Parker at Meherrin, Joseph Parker at Contantony (Little Creek), William Fulsher at Matchipungo (Pungo), and Wingfield (probably John Winfield) at Bear River. William Parker would remain at Meherrin until his death about 1793, after which this church moved into the Particular Baptist circle under the leadership of Lemuel Burkitt. An account of this transition of Meherrin Church is given by Burkitt and Read as follows:

This church was originally gathered, and constituted on the Free-will plan. Elders Joseph Parker, William Parker, Winfield, and others of that order, frequently preached here. Elder William Parker was a resident in this neighborhood; who after being baptized, and giving himself a member of the church here, began to preach. At what time the church was constituted on this plan we are not able to say. Elder W. Parker was in the exercise of the pastoral function as early as the year 1773. How long before we are not able to say. The customary way with him in receiving members, was to baptize all who were willing, and requested it. In consequence of which he baptized many, as he required no experience previous to their admission. ... After his death the church requested Elder Burkitt to attend them, which he did and preached to them statedly for some time. They at last concluded to come under re-examination, and be organized on the orthodox plan, and join the Kehukee Association. It was carried into effect, Elder Burkitt and several members from his church attended at a time appointed for that business and a small number was received, and as a church of Christ professing the same

faith, on which our Association is established, they petitioned the Association for admission, and their petition was granted in the year 1794.¹⁷

William Fulsher, who had participated in the organization of a church at or near New Bern and one at Flea Point in Beaufort County as described in Chapter Three, became pastor of the church at Matchipungo (Pungo) in Beaufort County some time before 1773. After this date his name no longer appears in the records as a pastor. John Winfield, who is listed as pastor of the church at Bear River by Morgan Edwards in 1772, is named in Asplund's *Register* as pastor of the church at Pungo in 1790. Winfield, along with Joseph and William Parker, is named as one of the General Baptist ministers who preached occasionally at Meherrin Church. These men must have itinerated among the remaining General Baptist churches in a valiant effort to preserve what they could of the remnant by mutual encouragement and constant appeal to the doctrines set forth in the Confession of 1660. That this confession of faith was still in use among the General Baptists in North Carolina is attested by Lemuel Burkitt and Jesse Read, whose work appeared in 1803. At the beginning of their account of the history of the Kehukee Association which was organized in 1769, they report that:

... The most of these churches, before they were ever united in an Association, were General Baptist, and held with the Arminian tenets. We believe they were the decendants of the English General Baptists, because we find from some original papers, that their Confession of Faith was subscribed by certain Elders, and Deacons, and Brethren, in behalf of themselves and others, to whom they belonged, both in London, and several counties in England, and was presented to King Charles the second.¹⁸

These Particular Baptist historians were referring to the

opening statement in the Confession of 1660, a copy of which must have fallen into their hands at an earlier date. The "Brief Confession" which had served English General Baptists so well in the decades following the restoration of Charles II and the consequent persecution of Dissenters of all types was still the creedal statement that bound together these few remaining congregations of General Baptists in North Carolina in the closing decades of the eighteenth century. This document was probably the single most important source outside of the Bible which gave expression to the faith of these simple people. In Chapter Seven we will show how this same confession of faith was revised by the leading ministers of the next generation of General Baptists so that it could continue to serve future generations of the church.

The most important of the remaining ministers who refused to be taken in by the proselyting efforts of the Calvinistic Baptists was Joseph Parker. We have noted above how he purchased property on Little Contentnea Creek and began to gather churches in the area then known as Dobbs County. These churches include Little Creek, Wheat Swamp, Louson Swamp, Grimsley, and one church in Pitt County, Gum Swamp. Although we are unable to give exact dates for the organization of these churches, it is likely that they were all gathered as a result of the faithful labors of Joseph Parker after he settled on the tract of land on Little Contentnea Creek which he purchased on December 25, 1756. It seems likely that most of these churches began as branches of Little Creek, which we assume was the first to be organized, for it was the pattern among General Baptists to gather a congregation at a given location and then to establish "branches" within a radius of several miles. When these "branches" had grown sufficiently to be organized as churches, they would petition the "mother church" for dimission and then be organized as local churches.

According to S. J. Wheeler, Joseph Parker spent his last years at Wheat Swamp to which he must have removed some years before his death. Wheeler states that he "departed this life about 1791 or 1792, and was buried in Robert Wyrington's burial ground on Wheat Swamp."¹⁹ The only description given of his physical

characteristics is one supplied by Wheeler who quotes an aged Baptist minister as saying that Parker "was a square-built man, with broad face, about 5 feet 8 inches high: in his latter years he wore on his head a cap continually. His manner in preaching was full of animation."²⁰



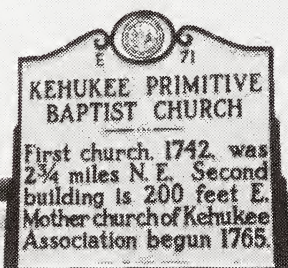
Little Creek OFWB Church; Gum Swamp OFWB Church





Top: Meherrin Baptist Church-organized c.1735

Bottom: Kehukee Historical Marker; Kehukee Primitive Baptist Church



Chapter V

Movements Contemporary with Early Free Will Baptists

The last half of the eighteenth century and the first decade of the nineteenth were eventful times for Protestants in America and especially for Baptists. While the Great Awakening was winding down among New England Congregationalists, it was just beginning for Baptists. Although Baptists had been present in the Massachusetts Bay colony almost from the beginning, they were not numerous. They, like other Dissenters, were often persecuted and were forced to provide tax support to the Established Church (Congregationalist) against their own convictions.

In Connecticut, where revivals were still occurring around 1750, a movement began among "Strict Congregationalists" who disliked the fact that the churches were admitting to communion persons who had not had a conversion experience. These same churches were also baptizing the children of persons who had not been admitted to full membership in the church but were only "halfway members," having been baptized as infants. Such practices, they felt, compromised the Puritan ideal of church membership which should be open only to the converted. This view was given support by the conversions which resulted from the impact of local revivals. The outcome of this was that in many towns these Strict Congregationalists withdrew to form Separate Congregational churches.

As their numbers increased in Connecticut and in other parts of New England, some of these Separate Congregational churches were converted to Baptist views. The existing Baptist churches soon recognized the significance of what was happening among their Congregational neighbors and began to win over more and more of them to the view that if conversion is the decisive Christian experience, then infant baptism is an anomaly. The Baptist argument that baptism properly follows conversion then becomes convincing. In the long run many of these Separate Congregational churches became Separate Baptist churches.

Meanwhile, individuals belonging to the Congregational churches, once they accepted the doctrine of believers' baptism, would simply seek membership in a Baptist church. Thus the Baptists reaped a greater harvest from the revivals of the Great Awakening during the latter half of the eighteenth century than did any other denomination in New England.

Perhaps the most important convert for New England Baptists was Isaac Backus (1724-1806), born in Norwich, Connecticut, and converted in a local revival in 1741. He later joined a Separate Congregational church and in 1748 accepted a call to minister to a Separate church at North Middleborough, Massachusetts.¹ Unable to resolve the controversy over the question of baptism, he and five others who had received baptism covenanted to form a strict communion Baptist church. Thus began a distinguished career of service as pastor, evangelist, advocate of religious liberty, and historian of New England Baptists.

The "New Light" or Separate Baptists increased rapidly in New England throughout the latter half of the eighteenth century and well into the nineteenth. In 1804 there were as many as 312 Baptist churches grouped in thirteen associations throughout New England as well as a growing number of Freewill (Arminian) Baptist churches which were located largely in northern New England. These latter will be treated in some detail in the next chapter.

The story of Baptists in North Carolina was greatly affected by the migration of a small number of Separate Baptist families from Connecticut to the South. Their leader was Shubal Stearns, a native of Boston who embraced Baptist views in 1751 in Tolland, Connecticut. He was later joined by his brother-in-law, Daniel Marshall, both of them ministers. These families first settled in Virginia in 1754 where they began to preach in their animated style but were disappointed with the results obtained. Then they learned from friends who had settled in North Carolina that there were people living there who would ride horseback forty miles to hear a single sermon. They decided to move to an area of Guilford County (present Randolph County) and settled at Sandy

Creek in 1755. There they formed a church called Sandy Creek which soon increased to more than six hundred members, including branches of the mother church. As their numbers were increased by the many conversions in scattered locations and preachers were raised up to serve as pastors, they organized within three years the Sandy Creek Association with three churches.

Many of the Separate Baptist preachers followed the pattern of itinerant ministers of that day. Rather than settle in one place and labor to build a congregation they made frequent journeys with the aim of winning converts and establishing "branches" which might soon be organized as churches. Daniel Marshall, for example, moved to South Carolina where he planted numerous churches and afterwards moved to Georgia, west of Augusta, and there churches continued to spring up under his ministrations. Another esteemed minister among the Separates was Samuel Harris whose labors in Virginia resulted in a remarkable increase of both churches and ministers. Meanwhile, Shubal Stearns led in the formation of other churches in North Carolina as he preached throughout a wide area in the Piedmont and even journeyed repeatedly to eastern North Carolina.² He preached with notable success in several counties in southeastern North Carolina. Separate Baptist influence was beginning to be felt in the east at the very time that General Baptist churches were being replaced by Particular Baptist churches. At first there was tension between the Separates and the "Regulars," as the churches which began as Particular Baptist congregations came to be known to distinguish them from the Separates. The Separate Baptists were even more influenced by the extremes of the itinerant evangelists of the Great Awakening. They were often described as "enthusiasts" by their critics because of their exuberant style of preaching with an affected tone of voice which frequently left their hearers in a highly emotional state. In the various places where they preached the people had seldom if ever witnessed anything like this. Still, wherever they went there were the usual conversions and baptisms, followed by the organization of new churches.

One of those churches organized by Shubal Stearns was at

Grassy Creek in Granville County. Here there was a General Baptist congregation with a meeting house built before 1755, for in August of that year Rev. Hugh McAden, a young Presbyterian itinerant minister, preached here to a large congregation.³ In the following year Daniel Marshall visited this community and preached with his usual zeal and fervor, making many converts. It is said that Stearns also visited the church at Grassy Creek in 1757 and urged them to send a representative to Sandy Creek the following year at which time an association would be formed. However, the Separate Baptist church at Grassy Creek was not constituted until 1762, according to Asplund's *Register*, published in 1794.⁴ Many of those who became a part of this new constitution were General Baptists. Just who was the first to preach and gather a congregation at Grassy Creek we do not know, but it was perhaps a branch of the church at Upper Fishing Creek in Halifax County. If so, it is likely that Josiah Hart preached here and baptized many. This is the only congregation of General Baptists that is known to have become a part of the Separate Baptist movement, but there were likely other converts in scattered places in eastern North Carolina where General Baptist preachers had sown the seed, the harvest of which was reaped by the Separate Baptists. The church at Grassy Creek, after its reconstitution, was said to be a flourishing church. Its first pastor, James Read, used to go on missionary tours, making many converts and baptizing them into the membership of the church. Several arms or "branches" of this church were established in a radius of fifty miles, both in Virginia and in North Carolina, which later became distinct churches with their own pastors.⁵

Many of these Separate Baptist churches in the Piedmont region saw their numbers greatly reduced as a result of political disturbances which led to the Battle of Alamance (May 16, 1771) and the removal of families westward to the mountains of North Carolina and across the Appalachian chain into Tennessee and Kentucky. Baptists in other areas of the Carolinas and Virginia moved westward and southward in search of cheap land. In places as far west as the Mississippi River, these pioneers settled down

and organized Baptist churches. It is these Separate Baptists, migrating westward and southward, who did most to spread the Baptist message and to bring about a phenomenal increase in the number of Baptist churches throughout the South.

As early as 1767 there was talk of possible merger between Regular and Separate Baptists in Virginia, but it was not until 1787 that a union of these two groups was effected. Afterwards they were called United Baptists, and under that name scores of churches were established by Virginia Baptists migrating across the mountains at the turn of the century. In North Carolina the Kehukee Association began to receive Separate churches only after a division occurred in the association in 1775 over the issue of baptizing persons who had not experienced conversion. The issue had been raised by Separate Baptist ministers from Virginia, who rejected union with the Regulars because they alleged that this practice was still accepted by churches in the Kehukee Association. Gradually this issue was finally resolved by the fact that the Regulars agreed to exclude from fellowship those members who admitted that they had been baptized without the requisite experience of conversion. Those churches which favored reform were at first fewer in number than those which opposed it. Thus, for several years there were two associations, both claiming to be the Kehukee Association. Finally, when the issues which had kept the Separates and the Regulars apart had been removed, the two factions of the Kehukee Association and the Separate Baptist Churches of eastern North Carolina were united and took the name "The United Baptist Association," formerly called the Kehukee Association.⁶ Later the more popular name, Kehukee, again prevailed as the official name of the association after the churches south of the Tar River were dismissed in 1793 to form the Neuse Association.⁷

The Kehukee Association, despite its gradual acceptance of a union with the Separates, who were more inclined to take the Bible alone as their authority rather than creeds or confessions, drew up a Confession of Faith which adhered to the tenets of Calvinism in the most rigid terms.⁸ This was one reason for the decline in the

number of converts in the Kehukee Association in the last decade of the eighteenth century. Although the revivals of the Second Awakening in the early nineteenth century brought large numbers of converts into these churches, the controversies over the support of missions and education would finally lead the association to declare against these programs and give impetus to the hyper-Calvinism which found support in the Confession of Faith of the Kehukee Association. When the North Carolina Baptist State Convention was formed in 1830, many of these churches in the Kehukee Association refused to participate in an organization whose major role was that of giving financial support to such causes as missionary societies and education. Because of their reaction to the progressive changes taking place among Baptists throughout the United States during the first half of the nineteenth century, these churches, along with others of like faith, became known as Primitive Baptists.

Among the changes taking place among most Baptists, as well as other denominations in the Reformed tradition during this period, was a softening of the Calvinism which they professed to hold. Some were shifting toward an Arminian position on such doctrines as divine election and free will. As early as 1791 John Leland, a Baptist minister who had come from Massachusetts to Virginia in 1776, wrote:

I conclude that the *eternal purposes* of God, and the *freedom of the human will*, are both truths; and it is a matter of fact, that the preaching that has been blessed of God, and most profitable to men, is *the doctrine of sovereign grace in the salvation of souls*, mixed with a *little of what is called Arminianism*. These two propositions can be tolerably well reconciled together, but the misfortune is, that men often spend too much time in explaining away one or the other, or in fixing the lock-link to join the others together; and by such means, have but little time in a sermon to insist on those two great things which God blesses.⁹

The fact that Baptists in America had so readily adopted the methods of the revivalists of the Great Awakening of the eighteenth century and had continued to increase their membership, even during the Revolutionary War and afterwards, meant that some of their preachers were willing to soften their Calvinism in the interest of winning more converts. By 1800 Baptists had become the largest denomination in the United States.¹⁰

The Origin of Methodism in America

The origin and development of Methodism in America during this same period also contributed to a growing acceptance of Arminian doctrines. Whereas Reformed Protestants, which included Presbyterians, Congregationalists, and Particular Baptists had long regarded Arminianism with suspicion or outright opposition as heretical, Methodism championed such doctrines as the free moral agency of man and the belief that Christ died for the entire human race.

Methodism was not introduced in America as a denomination and its coming was much later than that of other major Protestant groups. This movement began not long after John Wesley had a religious experience while attending an Anglican "society" meeting in Aldersgate Chapel in London on the evening of May 25, 1738. While listening to a reading from Luther's *Commentary on Romans*, he later wrote, "I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me, that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death." This experience became for Wesley the normal way of entrance into the Christian life. A few days earlier his brother Charles had a similar experience. Already an ordained clergyman in the Church of England, Wesley began preaching wherever opportunities became available. Invited by his friend, George Whitefield, to Bristol, he soon followed Whitefield's example of preaching to crowds in the open air and he continued this practice as long as health permitted in his desire to reach the poor who were often alienated from the Church of

England.

The Wesleys began to organize their converts into "societies" in order to provide instruction and mutual support. Thereafter they began to develop lay preachers who helped to form other societies and to provide spiritual leadership. In 1744 a meeting of these lay preachers was held in London, the first of the "annual conferences." Wesley's effort to obtain episcopal ordination for these lay preachers was denied; therefore, members of the "methodist" societies had to depend upon clergy of the Church of England to receive the sacraments. Wesley had no desire to break with the Anglican Church and, in fact, it was only after his death that the Methodist Church in England became a separate denomination.

Methodist societies were formed in America prior to the Revolution in the area between the Chesapeake Bay region and southward as far as North Carolina. They were nominally related to the Anglican Church, but few Anglican clergymen were sympathetic with the movement. Francis Asbury was the most active lay preacher in America, traveling hundreds of miles each year to visit these societies and to make converts in widely separated communities. Here, as in England, the members of these societies were dependent upon the ordained clergy for the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. During the Revolution most of the Anglican clergy, who were loyal to the English crown, fled the country, leaving but few to administer the sacraments. Meanwhile the number of societies and members increased so that appeals were made to Wesley to send ordained clergy to meet the growing needs of the "methodists" in America, where there was no bishop to provide episcopal ordination. Wesley felt that he had no recourse but to ordain men himself, which was contrary to Anglican Church law. Two men were ordained and sent to America, along with the Reverend Thomas Coke, who was appointed to be joint superintendent with Francis Asbury over the Methodists in America. After their arrival a conference was convened at Baltimore in 1784, and the Methodist Episcopal Church was born. At this time the number of Method-

ists in America was less than 15,000, but by 1790 the number had increased to more than 57,000. From the beginning men were ordained and sent out to preach and to travel regularly on a "circuit," thus enabling them to provide a ministry to churches over a wide area. They not only evangelized the more settled areas along the eastern seaboard but also traveled across the mountains, following the westward migration of families who were settling on the frontier of America. By 1820 the Methodists had overtaken the Baptists and had become the largest denomination in the country.¹¹ They, along with the Baptists, were to reap the greatest harvests in the revivals during the early decades of the nineteenth century known as the Second Great Awakening. The impact of these revivals with the large number of conversions prompted most progressive Protestants in America by mid-century to become practicing Arminians in that they felt it necessary in the words of Robert Baird "to preach to sinners as if they believed them to be possessed of all the powers of moral agency, capable of turning to God, and on this account, and no other, inexcusable for not doing so."¹² The spreading influence of Methodism played no little part in these developments.

Methodism was introduced into North Carolina by the Reverend Devereux Jarratt, who was the Anglican rector at Bath in Dinwiddie County, Virginia. He was enlisted by Robert Williams, one of Wesley's lay preachers, to engage in a wider ministry that would take him beyond his own parish into several counties of Virginia and North Carolina. His preaching drew large crowds and with the help of lay preachers he organized his converts into "methodist" societies. As a result of their labors by 1777 there were 4,379 members of the societies in Virginia and adjoining counties of North Carolina.¹³ Most of these were in Virginia, but by 1780 there were four circuits of societies in North Carolina. After the Methodist Episcopal Church was constituted in 1784, the first annual conference of Methodist churches in North Carolina and Virginia was held on April 20, 1785, at the home of Green Hill, one mile south of Louisburg, North Carolina.

The Great Revival

It was in the year 1800 that the Second Awakening referred to above began to break forth in revivals on the frontier in Kentucky, the first of which was led by a Presbyterian minister, James McGready, at Red River in June of that year. This was followed by another at Gasper River in July, attended by people who traveled as much as fifty to one hundred miles. Camp meetings were staged at other locations which drew large crowds, the most famous of which was at Cane Ridge the following summer, which was attended by as many as 10,000. The preachers who conducted these early camp meetings were Presbyterians and Methodists. The camp meeting became the standard method of evangelizing the frontier areas and the Methodists were able to make the most effective use of it on the frontier where the population was scattered.

The physical and emotional manifestations at these early camp meetings, especially the one at Cane Ridge, have been described by many observers and later historians in their accounts of this religious phenomenon. To those whose lives were changed by this experience, it was a manifestation of the Spirit's power, but the excesses also drew criticism from others who were accustomed to greater restraint in their religious expression. The excitement created by these frontier revivals was bound to be carried to the most remote hamlets on the frontier and the news also traveled back East to the communities from which these rugged pioneers had come. This in turn stirred ministers in the more settled areas of the East to pray that such a divine visitation would occur in their churches also. One of those whose interest was peaked by the news of what was happening in Kentucky was Lemuel Burkitt. He decided to go and see for himself and to bring back a report of these things to the Regular Baptists of North Carolina. His visit seems to have convinced him that such revivals were possible in the churches of the Kehukee Association and, in fact, during the next several years these churches reported significant gains in membership.

Although Presbyterians were involved in the initial stages of the "Great Revival", their leaders were repelled by the reports of extreme outbursts of emotion which characterized this revival. The lax attitude about doctrines important to the Presbyterian Church also disturbed them. This in turn led to disciplinary action against participating ministers. The revival also led to conflict and schism in the Kentucky Synod of the Presbyterian Church. The fact that many churches were established for which ministers could not be supplied moved some presbyteries to ordain men who did not meet the educational standards of the Church. This resulted in defections, the largest of which became the Cumberland Presbyterian Church. Another small group of ministers who had participated in the revival and were charged with breaches of Presbyterian doctrine and polity withdrew and formed the Springfield Presbytery in 1803. A year later they published the "Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery," a document which revealed their intention of abandoning the "traditions of men" and taking the Bible as their only rule of faith and practice. They chose also to be called "Christians" and thus began the "western" branch of what was to become a movement to unite all Christians. Their leader and "founder" was Barton Stone. The number of their churches increased rapidly in Kentucky and in 1832 they joined forces with the followers of Alexander Campbell to become the Christian Church or Disciples of Christ.

The Southern Christian Church

Another movement which was to take the name "Christian" began as a revolt against the authoritarian structure of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Some Methodist ministers objected to Francis Asbury's assuming the title of bishop and exercising too much power over the Church. A schism occurred, led by James O'Kelly, and an organization was formed which became known as the Southern Christian Church. Like the Stonites they preferred the name Christian and a congregational church polity. They also took the Bible as the only creedal basis of fellowship. T h i s

movement was concentrated in Virginia and in Piedmont North Carolina, but there were also conferences in other states which were loosely affiliated with them. They established Elon College in North Carolina in 1890 and merged with the Congregationalists in 1931 to become the Congregational Christian Church. This denomination then merged with the Evangelical and Reformed Churches in 1957 to form the United Church of Christ.¹⁴

Origin of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

An account of the rise of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) begins with Thomas Campbell, who came to America from Northern Ireland in 1807. As a Presbyterian minister in western Pennsylvania, he was censured by the Associate Synod of North America for laxity in admitting people to the Lord's Supper. For this reason he withdrew and gathered a group of followers which became known as the "Christian Association of Washington County", Pennsylvania. Meanwhile, Campbell wrote and published his *Declaration and Address* in 1809, which was a statement of Christian principles that became normative for this movement. The document emphasized Christian unity based on a simple acceptance of the New Testament model of the church as over against denominationalism, which tended to divide Christians.

In 1809 Campbell's more aggressive son, Alexander, came to America, joined forces with his father, and soon became the leader of the movement. Through his writings and his public debates with other Christian leaders, he set the tone and the direction of the movement. For a short time his church at Brush Run, Pennsylvania, was a member of the Redstone Baptist Association, but his interpretation of the Bible and his application of its teachings soon set him apart from not only the Baptists but other Protestant groups as well. What he shared in common with other "Christian" movements described above was an emphasis on the Scriptures as the only rule of faith and practice. "Where the Scriptures speak, we speak; where the Scriptures are silent, we are silent" became the motto of this movement. They adopted an

extreme form of congregationalism which discouraged the formation of organizations above that of the local churches. Their avowed aim was to unite all Christians, which would eliminate all denominational structures as well as confessions and creeds, that were regarded as inherently divisive. Nevertheless, the movement gradually began to take on the characteristics of a denomination out of necessity to maintain an identity and to prevent the movement from falling apart. Having adopted believers' baptism, they took issue with Presbyterians and Methodists on infant baptism; they argued against Regular Baptists on the tenets of Calvinism; and they found themselves at odds with most denominations on the use of confessions of faith and rules of church government. Since Alexander Campbell regarded the New Testament as descriptive of the New Covenant as opposed to the Old Covenant set forth in the Old Testament, he emphasized the New Testament as the "law" for Christian life and worship. Like others before him he wanted to restore the primitive church of the New Testament, especially the pattern suggested by the book of Acts. For this reason he would use no name for the churches but those found in the New Testament for the followers of Christ — "Disciples" or "Christians." His ideas would later take root among some Baptists and some Free Will Baptists in eastern North Carolina.¹⁵

Chapter VI

The Rise of New England Freewill Baptists

The movements described in the previous chapter had some bearing on the history of Original Free Will Baptists either because of their geographical proximity or the fact that their later development impinged in some way on the historical development of this denomination. It may appear to some that a treatment of New England Freewill Baptists has little or no relevance for a study of Original Free Will Baptists. We can only ask that the reader suspend judgment on this question until a full account has been given of later historical developments.

The New England movement began long after the rise of General Baptists in North Carolina. It may be said to have had its impetus from the continuing influence of the revivals of the Great Awakening in northern New England and more specifically the preaching of George Whitefield, who toured that area on his last visit to America.

The founder of this movement and its leader from 1780 until his death in 1808 was Benjamin Randall.¹ He was born in New Castle, New Hampshire, in 1749. From his earliest years he was keenly conscious of the duty to live a virtuous life. Since his parents were members of the Congregational Church, he was likely given some religious training. It was his habit to pray before going to bed at night and always on his knees or in a prostrate position. His formal education was quite limited, for at the age of nine he was taken to sea with his father, who was a sea captain, and could return to his studies for brief periods only between voyages. He found the life of a sailor quite disagreeable because of the profane language used by those around him. His father therefore apprenticed him to a sail-maker by the name of Tripe, who taught him the art of sail-making.

While engaged in learning this trade, he allowed himself to participate with his friends in what they called "civil recreation", which included dancing, but because of his piety he felt under a

cloud after having done so. According to his own testimony, he was several times during his youth under deep conviction and "had fearful apprehensions concerning the state of his soul."²

In 1770, when Randall was twenty-one, George Whitefield came to Portsmouth, New Hampshire, which was not far from New Castle. With some reluctance Randall went to hear him, for in his words, "I was much opposed to all traveling preachers."

The sight of Whitefield appealing to sinners with tears in his eyes brought a negative response from the young Randall. But he returned to hear him a second and a third time, yet he was still unmoved by the message even though he marveled at how wonderfully the man spoke. The next day (Sunday, September 30, 1770), after Randall had left the meeting-house in Portsmouth, a man came riding by and announced that Whitefield was dead. These words were like an arrow from the Almighty, he said, as he pondered his own fate in light of the fact that he had reviled this man of God who was now in heaven. He tried to keep his thoughts to himself as he felt his entire being under condemnation. He continued in this state of mind for two weeks as he tried to pray but gained no relief. Then the words of Hebrews 9:26 came to mind, "But now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself." As these words passed through his mind for the third time, he began to feel the burden of sin lifted and a peace settled over him. As he pondered the meaning of his experience, he concluded that God had wrought a change in his soul which could only be what the scriptures described as the new birth.

Of interest to later Freewill Baptists is the fact that Randall was converted after hearing of the death of a Calvinistic evangelist (Whitefield) and that he interpreted his own experience as indicative of God's universal love and Christ's death as a universal atonement. Thus his biographer quotes him as saying:

I saw in him a universal love, universal atonement, a universal call to mankind, and was confident that none would ever perish but those who refused to obey it. O,

what love I felt to all mankind and wished that they all might share in that fullness which I saw so extensive and so free for them all.³

About a year after his conversion Randall took as his wife Joanna Oram, the daughter of a sea captain from Kittery, Maine. The couple decided to seek membership in the Congregational Church at New Castle before the birth of their first child. Randall himself was considered a "half-way" member by virtue of his parents' membership and the fact that he had received infant baptism. Although he normally would have been expected to give testimony to his conversion experience as a condition for full membership, the minister of the Congregational Church did not inquire into such matters but simply gave him a copy of the church covenant which he took home and subscribed to it by signing his name.

Randall soon found himself in an unhappy situation as a member of this church, for some of its members appeared to live intemperate and undisciplined lives and no corrective action was taken by the church. He became so distressed that he could neither eat nor sleep. While the townspeople slept, he walked the streets and prayed for them. The following summer he began to talk to his friends in private about his convictions and this led to his holding meetings for the purpose of singing together, praying, and the reading of a sermon. His invitation to another minister to come to New Castle for a meeting at the local church met with disapproval by the pastor. When the meeting was held at the church over the objection of the pastor, Randall found himself completely alienated from his own minister despite his attempts to settle the matter in private. Finally, in May 1775 he ended his relationship with the church by deliberately absenting himself from communion.

Following the birth of his third child, Randall began to examine the scriptures on the subject of infant baptism. It was about this time that his own home town became involved in the struggle against the British at the beginning of the American

Revolution. While serving two brief terms in the army, he came to the conclusion that only believers are the proper candidates for baptism and therefore the baptism of infants should be laid aside. Nevertheless, his conviction on this issue was not so firm as to object to the christening of their third child.⁴

Meanwhile, Randall began to feel that he himself should be baptized by immersion. Because this act would mean his becoming identified with the Baptists, he did not immediately share his thoughts with his circle of friends, who were Congregationalists. The opportunity to be immersed came while attending an ordination service in Madbury, New Hampshire, after which he and three others were baptized by the newly ordained minister, Mr. William Hooper. He then united with the Calvinistic Baptist Church at Berwick, Maine.

For some time Randall had also been struggling with the conviction that he had been called to preach. Having been brought up in a Congregational church and as a member of the church in New Castle, he was well aware of the fact that he lacked the education which the ministers there had received. They had all been college graduates, either from Harvard or Yale.⁵ Although his study of the Gospels taught him that Christ could use the five loaves and two fishes to feed a multitude of five thousand, he was still not convinced that he should take up this awesome responsibility. One day as he finished reading a printed sermon to the group with which he had been meeting, one of them said to him: "I am tired of hearing you read old sermons. If you will not preach to us, do leave off reading old sermons and read the Bible."⁶ These words troubled him and when he began to read a sermon at the next meeting of the group, he became so distressed that he threw down the book and confessed that the Lord had made it manifest for two years past that he should preach the gospel. Now he was ready to commit himself to this ministry.⁷

Before long Randall was preaching at every opportunity while continuing his work as a sail-maker and tailor in order to support his growing family. He had the satisfaction of seeing the results of his preaching in the conversion of several persons during the

first few months of his evangelistic endeavors. His success enhanced his reputation among those who "heard him gladly", but it also aroused opposition on the part of some men who would stoop to harassment or even threats of violence. Once he was informed that if he came to a certain place where he was to preach, there was a group of forty men who planned to meet him outside the town and to tar and feather him. But the threat did not deter him from going. He went to the house where the meeting was to be held and preached while the mob stood outside in a rainstorm. After the meeting ended, he left the place unharmed.

In 1777 Randall was invited to preach in the town of New Durham, New Hampshire. He was well received by those who heard him and was urged to relocate in the town. At this time he was not ready to make such a move, but several months later he agreed to go with the understanding that he "never intended to be confined to any people but meant to be every person's minister."⁸ In later years his preaching tours and church planting would take him to many places throughout northern New England, which at this time was rapidly being settled by people moving out of southern New England. The fact that it was a frontier area helps to account for the fact that Randall and his followers, the later Freewill Baptists, were given a receptive hearing. Their doctrine of a universal atonement with its emphasis on free will appealed to these people who by their own determination had cut down forests, erected homes, and organized towns on the frontier.

It was only after Randall had settled at New Durham that he became aware that his own convictions were at variance with the doctrines of other Baptists. In his relationship with his Baptist brethren ever since he had been baptized he had enjoyed complete harmony, unaware that they did not share his Arminian views. Then one day he was asked by one of his Baptist brothers why he did not preach election as taught by Mr. Calvin. His reply was, "Because I do not believe it". This open rejection of a Calvinist doctrine led to other disputes which resulted in the calling of a council at the Baptist meeting house in Gilmanton, New Hampshire, in July 1779. Randall was called upon to answer for his

views and a debate ensued which lasted for the greater part of two days, at the end of which he found himself out of fellowship with his Baptist brethren.

In a meeting of the Gilmanton Church that fall Edward Lock, who had earlier been licensed to preach by that church, announced that he was no longer in fellowship with the church because he could not subscribe to certain of its articles of faith which were Calvinistic. His request for a letter of dismissal to join the church at Loudon, where he had been preaching, was denied.⁹ At another council held at the Gilmanton Church, which was called to consider Lock's request for ordination, he was first examined on his views concerning "the doctrine of regeneration by sovereign grace". They found that Lock and a group of nine sympathizers were in error because they "held that men have power in themselves by the grace common to all men to believe and love the gospel."¹⁰ Lock's request for ordination was denied and the council declared that he had departed from the true faith. At this same meeting another minister, Tozier Lord, was present, who stated openly that he shared the same beliefs as Randall. Whereupon the council withdrew fellowship from Tozier Lord also. Later Edward Lock, whose request for ordination had been denied by the council, was ordained by Lord and these two men, along with a ruling elder, John Shepard, ordained Benjamin Randall at New Durham on April 5, 1780.¹¹

A group of men and women living in and around New Durham who shared the same faith as Randall decided to form a church based on a set of articles of faith and a written covenant. Randall was asked to write the articles and the covenant and lay them before the brethren for their approval. On June 30, 1780, this group of seven signed the covenant which embodied them into a church. Thus they launched the beginning of a new movement in new England though it was not known at the beginning by the name Freewill Baptist. Randall called the church he organized "the Baptist Church of Christ at New Durham."¹² It was not until 1799 that the new denomination chose the name Freewill Baptist.

After having broken fellowship with his brethren among the

Calvinistic Baptists of New Hampshire, Randall was still struggling with certain passages in the New Testament that were often used by his opponents to refute his stand against the doctrines of predestination and election and his affirmation of God's love for all mankind and universal atonement. Among these were Romans 8:29, Ephesians 1:4, and Romans 9:13. When confronted with these verses of scripture by his detractors, he would make no claim to a full understanding of them, but he would insist that if they were fully understood, they would not contradict his belief in the universal call of the gospel.¹³ This conflict without and within became such a trial for him that he constantly pleaded with the Lord for divine guidance. Then one day in July 1780 he was in such distress that he went into a remote part of his cornfield during the growing season and sat down on a rock. There he cried, "Lord, why may I not be taught?" The answer which came to him was that he was still clinging to traditions and former associations and that he "needed much purifying and refining." He therefore surrendered himself with these words, "Lord, here I am, take me, and do with me as thou wilt."¹⁴ What Randall experienced at this time was a sense of the awesome majesty of God which overwhelmed him and a vision of divine revelation in the scriptures which removed all confusion and doubt concerning the meaning of those scriptures which had been used against him. He later recalled this aspect of his experience in these words:

I saw all the scriptures in perfect harmony; and those texts, about which my opposers were contending, were all opened to my mind; and I saw that they ran in perfect connection with the universal love of God to men—the universal atonement in the work of redemption, by Jesus Christ, who tasted death for every man—the universal appearance of grace to all men, and with the universal call of the gospel; and, glory to God! my soul has never been in any trials about the meaning of those scriptures since.¹⁵

That Randall would wrestle with these issues, together with the fact that he was now alienated from his former associates because of his doctrinal convictions, is not strange. Other than men like Tozier Lord and Edward Lock and the small congregations which he and they had so recently gathered, he had no moral support among the larger population of New Hampshire and other parts of New England. The Calvinist doctrines which he had rejected were held by the Congregational churches, which enjoyed public support throughout most of New England, the Presbyterian Church, and the Baptist churches. The Methodists had not yet penetrated northern New England when Randall launched the Freewill Baptist movement. It was not until 1794 that a New Hampshire town, Chesterfield, was on the list of appointments in the New England Conference of this Arminian body.¹⁶ Great courage and deep conviction as well as complete dedication were required if the movement begun by Randall was to be crowned with success. All these were qualities which Randall possessed in considerable measure.

Not long after his "cornfield" experience Randall made a visit to Maine, the first of many trips that would take him to towns in Maine and New Hampshire, where he began his mission of preaching, making converts, and gathering churches. For some time these churches were regarded as branches of the church in New Durham. Their numbers increased until there were fourteen by the end of 1781.¹⁷ Randall visited them as often as he could and if problems arose, they consulted with him or the "mother" church at New Durham. Year by year Randall expanded his tours over a wider area in New Hampshire and the District of Maine until in 1790 there were twenty churches. Meanwhile, the number of ministers who had answered the call or had been converted to Randall's Arminian doctrines had also increased so that there was a supply of pastors for the churches. Most of these men lacked the cultural advantages of ministers of the Standing Order,¹⁸ but this very fact gave them added appeal to the frontiersmen of northern New England. At least one of them, Pelatiah Tingley, was a college graduate (Yale). In time the movement was able to

attract young men who became gifted leaders, some of whom distinguished themselves as pastors and evangelists. In 1790 there were eight ordained ministers, nine ruling elders, and seven preachers or exhorters; by 1800 the number of ordained ministers had reached a total of thirty-one.

Such growth demanded more organization if the movement was to maintain unity and continue to prosper. As early as 1783 Randall and his co-workers discussed the possibility of an organization that would meet regularly to deal with common problems, receive reports from the churches, and ordain ministers. The idea was approved by the churches and the first such meeting was held in December of that year. Since it was agreed that meetings of this type should be held once each quarter, it became known as the Quarterly Meeting.

During this period the Quarterly Meeting was regarded as the Church and the local congregations its branches. Delegates from the latter brought their records to the Quarterly Meeting to be reviewed and any matters of discipline taken at the local level could be finally resolved at the Quarterly Meeting. Ministerial candidates were recommended by the local church but were approved for ordination at the Quarterly Meeting, which also certified whether or not a minister was in good standing. The Quarterly Meeting could appoint a committee to resolve difficulties in a local church and assist a church in calling a minister or in providing pulpit supply.¹⁹ Thus the Quarterly Meeting exercised many of the functions that had previously been reserved to the local congregations, which generally were referred to as Monthly Meetings.

As the movement continued to grow in the first decade of its existence there were local churches (Monthly Meetings) springing up over a wider area that lacked the supervision needed for them to become viable and thriving congregations. These newly formed Monthly Meetings were subject to the proselyting of other churches and the general malaise which sometimes follows in the wake of revivals. Randall decided that further organization was needed to care for the growing number of churches. He therefore

proposed in 1792 that new Quarterly Meetings be formed and that the original Quarterly Meeting become known as the Yearly Meeting, though it would continue to meet four times a year in four different locations. The Monthly Meetings would send delegates to the Quarterly Meetings and the Quarterly Meetings would send delegates to the Yearly Meeting.

These new Quarterly Meetings were formed to provide counsel and support to the growing number of churches. Each church was to have a clerk to keep its records and he was to attend the Quarterly Meeting, taking his records with him. In addition, delegates would also attend and, together with the clerk, they would report the condition of the church at each Quarterly Meeting. The Quarterly Meeting would also have a clerk to maintain its records. Matters referred to it by the local churches would be attended to at the Quarterly Meeting, but if an issue could not be resolved at that level, it would be referred to the Yearly Meeting, which would consist of delegates from each of the Quarterly Meetings. The Yearly Meeting would also consider any other business which it deemed to be in the interest of all the churches. Thus for almost fifty years the Yearly Meeting was the highest tribunal in the denomination. At the same time this arrangement made it possible for information concerning every part of the connection to be available annually through the reports made at each session. Furthermore, the Quarterly Meetings and Yearly Meetings were scheduled so that ministers could attend as many such meetings as their own work schedule would permit. As a result the ministers were frequently engaged in traveling from one place to another and this provided opportunity for spreading the message of salvation as well as reporting the progress of the gospel in all parts of the connection. These meetings also were occasions that drew large crowds in attendance so that they sometimes had to meet out in the open. As might be expected, there was much preaching at these assemblies and revivals would frequently occur in the areas where the meetings were held. People were drawn for miles around to hear the gospel and to listen to the proceedings. In this way new converts were made and

members were added to the churches.

As was stated above, this movement which began with a congregation of seven persons at New Durham in 1780 was not designated as Freewill Baptist. Randall himself and the records of the church simply referred to it as The Church of Christ at New Durham. As this church was the oldest and since this was the residence of Randall, whose leadership and counsel was highly regarded and sought after throughout the connection, the term "New Durham Church" or New Durham Connection was sometimes used. Members of this connection were frequently called "General Provisioners" because of their belief in a general atonement. And since they held that the will of man was *free*, they were more generally called "Freewillers" as a term of derision. There were also other names, such as "Randallites," "New Lights," and "Open Communionists" which were given them by their detractors. The first recorded use of the name Freewill Baptist was in 1799 when it appeared on certificates of ordination given to men who were ordained that year. Even then the name was not received with favor by all, perhaps because it was a name given to them by those who opposed them.²⁰

Although many of them would have preferred simply to be called Baptist because they shared the view that only believers should be baptized, yet the Baptists of New England and of New Hampshire in particular refused to acknowledge them, and likewise the churches of the Standing Order. For this reason these Freewill Baptists very often were forced to pay taxes in support of the minister of the Standing Order in the towns where they lived if the selectmen of the town refused to honor the exemption certificates which they had obtained from their Quarterly Meeting in order to be exempted from the payment of such taxes. In some instances property, such as a cow or a horse, was seized when an individual refused to pay the tax. This problem was finally resolved when the matter was taken before the New Hampshire legislature in 1804 at which time that body gave legal recognition to the denomination. Action was initiated in the House of Representatives on December 7, 1804, as follows: "Resolved, that the people

in this state, known by the name of the Freewill Antipedobaptist Church and Society, shall be considered as a distinct religious sect or denomination, with all the privileges as such, of the constitution." On the following day, December 8, the Senate concurred with this action. Since it was not vetoed by the Governor, the resolution became law.²¹ From that time until the laws of the state which provided for the support of ministers of the Standing Order were set aside (1819 in New Hampshire) Freewill Baptists were no longer placed in the position of having either to pay the tax or to be summoned to court in situations where their exemption certificates were not honored.

Benjamin Randall's last years were spent in laboring to expand the work of Freewill Baptists and to maintain contact with the churches by attending Quarterly Meetings and Yearly Meetings as long as his health would allow. In the early years of the nineteenth century the denomination experienced rapid growth. Much of this was due to the dedication and self-sacrifice of ministers like Randall, who traveled many miles each year to preach the gospel wherever there was an opportunity or an invitation. Revivals often began in places where Quarterly and Yearly Meetings were held and sometimes continued for weeks or months. These were not like the week of nightly services held in many churches today but were more spontaneous and were continued as long as people were being brought to an experimental knowledge of Christ. The services were long, sometimes lasting for hours, especially during Quarterly Meetings. At the August session of the New Durham Quarterly Meeting in 1805, held in Somersworth, "praise, prayer, exhortations and acclamations of joy, were heard for several hours."²² At this session five churches reported from twenty to forty conversions in each place while one church reported one hundred and thirty new converts.²³

It should be pointed out that at this time the Second Great Awakening was beginning to sweep across New England just as its impact was being felt in other parts of the country. Most denominations were affected by the revivals of this period in our nation's history. Even in North Carolina, as described above, both

Separate and Regular Baptists were experiencing large increases in church membership. The Methodists and Presbyterians were likewise increasing in numbers.

Randall's health was declining during these years, yet he continued to travel to as many meetings as possible and was often called on to deliver a sermon or to speak words of encouragement to the faithful. For months he continued his rigorous schedule when others would have chosen to remain at home for reasons of ill health. Gradually his voice became hoarse and his body weakened from lack of proper rest. When he could not attend meetings because of his illness, he would sometimes write a letter addressed to his brethren in which he endeavored to express his deepest thoughts and feelings as a means of inspiring them to be faithful to the Scriptures and to the work to which God had called them. During the last months of his life he was confined to his home in New Durham where many of his friends and co-workers visited him and conversed with him. The New Durham Monthly Meetings were held at his house in March, April, and May of 1808 so that he could join his brethren in these special services. Then on October 22, 1808, Randall died at the age of fifty-nine.²⁴ At his funeral a sermon was delivered by John Buzzell, who used as his text II Timothy 4:7,8. His body was laid to rest in the family burying ground and his grave was marked by a common marble slab. Fifty years later the Freewill Baptist denomination, in appreciation for his sacrificial labors, placed a marble monument at the site.²⁵

The number of churches in the Freewill Baptist Connection increased and likewise the number of Quarterly Meetings and Yearly Meetings until there were as many as seven Yearly Meetings, with churches in nine different states and two provinces in Canada by 1830. The need of an organization to receive reports from these bodies and to represent the entire denomination was clear. As early as 1805 Randall had suggested in a letter to the New Durham Quarterly Meeting that a "General Conference of all the elders" be established and such a plan was developed which brought the ministers together annually at the November session of

the Yearly Meeting.²⁶ This arrangement did not meet the needs of the connection and was later abandoned. The proposal which would bring about the establishment of the General Conference was initiated at the Yearly Meeting held at Sandwich, New Hampshire, in 1826. Action on this proposal was delayed until the next session in November of that year at which time a committee of twelve was chosen to bring a report to the body. Their recommendation called for, among other things, the Yearly Meetings to elect delegates to compose a General Conference, the first session of which should convene at Turnbridge, Vermont, on October 11, 1827. At this first session there were nineteen delegates from New England and one from New York and about thirty ministers present. Enoch Place was chosen as moderator and Hosea Quimby as clerk. The Conference, which lasted four days, included morning and evening sessions and the afternoons were devoted to meetings for worship. For the next six years the General Conference was held annually. Then from 1833 to 1841 it was convened biennially. In 1841 it was decided that the Conference should meet triennially and this continued until the denomination agreed to merge with the Northern Baptists in its triennial session in 1910. The actual merger occurred in the following year.

The jurisdiction of the General Conference over its constituent bodies was not at first well defined. It was not until 1841 that the constitution and by-laws were adopted. Questions sent to the General conference by the Yearly Meetings were dealt with but it was always understood that it could not reverse the decisions of the churches, Quarterly Meetings, and Yearly Meetings. Its main function was to promote unity and to provide the means through which the denomination could minister to the needs of the nation and the world.

In the 1830's Freewill Baptists became active in the anti-slavery movement and in 1839 the General Conference approved a resolution which endorsed the use of all proper means to promote the anti-slavery cause. In the following years there were numerous resolutions against slaveholding and the ill-treatment of

slaves. Sermons and speeches were delivered and essays were written to combat the evils of slavery. In 1850 when the General Conference met at Providence, Rhode Island, the Fugitive Slave Act had just become law. There was a Negro Freewill Baptist pastor present who was invited to address the Conference. He asked if the Conference would defend runaway slaves from their pursuers, who were at that time in the city. Finally he announced to the congregation that he himself was a fugitive from slavery. This caused such a stir that a committee was appointed to consider the matter and report back to the Conference. After hearing their report the Conference approved resolutions which denied unequivocally any obligation to submit to the Fugitive Slave Law and pledged to aid the fugitive in his efforts to escape from his would be captors.²⁷

Another cause which was given strong support by the Freewill Baptists was the temperance movement. This movement, which had its beginning in New England in the 1820's, was soon embraced by the great majority of the Freewill Baptist ministers and the evils of strong drink was a frequent subject at denominational meetings. The temperance crusade was begun as a reaction to the widespread use of alcoholic beverages at all social occasions and even at religious functions, including ordinations, church dedications, weddings, and funerals. What began as a movement to reduce the consumption of alcoholic beverages later became a crusade for total abstinence. Freewill Baptists joined other Protestant groups in discouraging the use of alcoholic beverages. As early as 1828 the northern General Conference adopted a resolution that Freewill Baptists should abstain from using ardent spirits "on all occasions except when they are necessary as a medicine."²⁸ Later actions by the General Conference went even farther to discourage not only personal use but also any dealings with those who drink or engage in the sale of alcohol.²⁹

The position taken by the northern Freewill Baptists on such issues as slaveholding and the use of ardent spirits would have been regarded as radical by many southerners in the first half of the nineteenth century. But such actions as those taken by the

General Conference of Freewill Baptists were typical of the moral reforms which followed in the wake of the "Great Revival" of that period, especially in the North. Many years would pass before Free Will Baptists in North Carolina would experience the full impact of such reforms as these.

Chapter VII

A Period of Transition and Revival

The reorganization of General Baptist churches brought about by the zeal of Particular Baptists, who were convinced of the errors of General Baptists in regard to doctrine and church discipline, had left the General Baptist movement in North Carolina in disarray. Only a remnant had kept their Arminian principles against the open hostility of their Calvinist adversaries. Unfortunately there was no historian among the General Baptists at the time who could preserve some account of their struggles for survival. If anyone of them kept a diary or journal, it has not survived. What is known of their continuing existence is due to the brief references to them given by their detractors. Without the testimony of these men we might suppose that for a time the General Baptist movement had been eclipsed by their more aggressive opponents.

We have noted earlier that Morgan Edwards listed certain churches, which he designated as Arminian, along with the members of the Kehukee Association. These included Contantony (Little Creek), Pungo, Meherrin, and Bear River and the names of their pastors: Joseph Parker, William Fulsher, William Parker, and John Winfield. More than fifteen years had passed since the first General Baptist churches had been reorganized in 1755 and these churches had not submitted to the reorganization process. In his treatment of the Baptist churches and ministers in North Carolina Morgan Edwards has no comment about these few churches and ministers who refused to embrace the views of the Particular Baptists. It is as though he felt they were unworthy of his attention or that, if he ignored them, they would perhaps disappear.

There were two other contemporaries of these General Baptists who have provided important information concerning their continuing existence. They were Lemuel Burkitt and Jesse Read who published their *Concise History of the Kehukee Association* in

1803. Both of these men were pastors of churches which were members of the association and their ministries began soon after the association was organized in 1769. They were actively involved in the annual meetings of the association, Burkitt having served as clerk of the association for a number of years beginning in 1773. As one of its leading ministers, he was largely responsible for preserving the records of the association during this same period. Both men traveled throughout the area, visiting churches and talking with leading members. They would have come in contact with many who were former members of General Baptist churches and would likely have known others who did not agree with the changes that had occurred among them in the reorganization process. Through these contacts they were able to obtain documents which indicated the English origin of these General Baptists as well as their doctrinal views. At the same time they referred to many of the churches which had formed the Kehukee Association as having formerly been organized on the "Free-will order" by Paul Palmer and Joseph Parker.¹ They also referred to William Parker's church at Meherrin and John Winfield's church at Pungo, neither of which had become members of the Kehukee Association, as churches of the Free-will order.² This designation clearly distinguished these churches from the Calvinistic churches of the Kehukee Association. The use of this terminology by these authors does not necessarily indicate that these churches had already chosen to designate themselves as Free Will Baptist. We have already seen in the case of the New England Freewill Baptists that the name was first used by their opponents and only later did they begin to adopt it for themselves. The same thing happened in regard to the North Carolina General Baptists, who were first called Free-Will Baptists by their opponents. The reader must recall that to believe one could become a child of God by one's own choice in response to the call of the gospel was regarded as a grave error by those who held strictly to the teachings of Calvin. According to these brethren, there was no such thing as free will for human beings. The idea that one might choose to believe in Christ or that one who is chosen could possibly reject Christ was

impossible.

Because the General Baptist churches and ministers in North Carolina who refused to embrace the Calvinist system left no records of their activities in the last decades of the eighteenth century, one cannot say unequivocally that they never used the name Free Will Baptist, which was used by their adversaries, but it does not appear likely. The earliest official document we have from this period is the Confession of 1812 which was prepared by James Roach and Jesse Heath at the request of the conference to which they belonged. Despite the fact that this document was prepared as a statement of faith and discipline for the conference and that it served the Free Will Baptist Church in revised form for more than a century, the 1812 document does not employ the name Free Will Baptist. The title page refers to "the Original Baptist Church Holding the Doctrine of General Provision," which indicates that the compilers of this document wished to identify themselves with the earliest English Baptists as well as the earliest Baptists in North Carolina, who distinguished themselves from other Baptists by their belief in the doctrine of a general or universal atonement. Such a distinction did not enjoy the favor of the Regular Baptists of eastern North Carolina at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

During the early decades of the nineteenth century the views of most Baptists in America would undergo certain changes. Many would reject the hyper-Calvinism of an earlier time, but there were those who clung to the doctrines of predestination, irresistible grace, and limited atonement. The former would become "practicing Arminians" and the latter would assume the name "Primitive Baptists." The more progressive Baptists organized new associations in eastern North Carolina, such as the Chowan Association, organized in 1806. But a large number of churches remained in the Kehukee Association and others were organized which adhered to the more rigid form of Calvinist teachings. One issue which set apart the churches of the Kehukee Association was the efforts of other Baptist associations to promote the cause of missions. Because of their opposition to the mission-

ary cause, the Kehukee Association completely severed their relations with all missionary Baptists in 1827. At the meeting of the association in 1827 a paper which had been presented at the last annual meeting and which had been referred to the churches for their consideration was brought back before the body for final action. After a full discussion of the matters contained in the paper, the association agreed "that we discard all Missionary Societies, Bible Societies and Theological Seminaries, and the practices heretofore resorted to for their support, in begging money from the public; ... believing these societies and institutions to be the inventions of men, and not warranted from the word of God."³ Thus the Kehukee Association set its course by its stand against any organization that tended to promote the cause of the gospel by means and methods not expressly sanctioned in the Bible.

Yet even the more progressive Baptist Churches in eastern North Carolina throughout the nineteenth century showed little interest in the Free Will Baptist churches located in their midst. Likewise, the records of Original Free Will Baptists reveal a similar attitude toward the Regular Baptists in the state. The hostility associated with the reorganization of the majority of General Baptist churches in North Carolina in mid-eighteenth century continued to tarnish the attitude of Free Will Baptists toward other Baptists in North Carolina whose antecedents had brought so much unhappiness to the remnant of General Baptist churches. The memory of those events was painful for those who experienced them first-hand and they passed on to later generations their feelings toward those who were the cause of their unhappiness. In 1881, over a century later, Rufus K. Hearn, who was the first Free Will Baptist to write an account of the origin of the Free Will Baptist Church, commented on the feelings generated by the reorganization process as follows:

At the time of the invasion and the scattering of the Free-Will Baptists in North Carolina, the uncharitable, and in many instances, malevolent feelings between the two

bodies were general and mutual. A lapse of over one hundred years has somewhat softened the acrimony of these feelings, but it has not eradicated them, for up to this time there is a deep-seated dislike on the part of both parties against the other. At this distant period, the Free-Will Baptists have heard so much of the breaking up of the early churches, that they can hardly regard the descendants of those that did it as Christians, and are but little disposed to fraternize with them. The views of the two sects in regard to doctrines and church building are nearly as variant as at the commencement of the separation, each party being confident that its views were right and those of the other ruinously wrong.⁴

Hearn was also familiar with Burkitt and Read's *Concise History of the Kehukee Association* with its account of those churches which had formerly been organized "on the Free will plan." He cites an incident from that source to explain how those who had been known as General Baptists came to be called Free Will Baptists. It happened, he said, in the Flat Swamp and Conetoe settlements in Pitt County, where a "New Light" church called Flat Swamp was organized about 1776. Sometime later, as Burkitt and Read report, the love of some of the members waxed cold and the seeds of discord were sown in the church, "which caused the *Arminians* and Universalists to look out of their dens, where they had been driven by the refulgent beams of gospel truths." Hearn identifies the source of the trouble for the Calvinistic Baptists of Flat Swamp Church as the members of Gum Swamp Church who would gather to hear their pastor, Elder William Parker, as he traveled through the Flat Swamp community to his appointments at Gum Swamp, located fifteen miles away. Because of the trouble which these people gave to the members of Flat Swamp Church, Hearn alleges, they called them, by way of reproach, "Freewillers."⁵ This designation is in keeping with what was said above about how the name Free Will Baptist came to be applied to those who had been known as General Baptists.

The term "Freewiller" was a term of reproach. It set these people apart from all those who resisted the idea that the human will is in any sense free to choose Christ or reject him. Such a view was anathema to the hyper-Calvinists. That General Baptists later decided to adopt the name Free Will Baptist for themselves appears to be what happened. Hearn himself acknowledges this when he writes, "I have now shown that the name, 'Free-Will,' was given to us by way of reproach. Elder Elias Hutchins of Dover, New Hampshire, says we were called Ana-Baptists, Baptists, and General Baptists, until the year 1828, when we adopted the name of Free-Will Baptists."⁶ There is no reason to doubt Hutchins' statement since he visited the Free Will Baptists in North Carolina as an itinerant evangelist in 1829, not long after the initial contacts between North Carolina Free Will Baptists and the New England Freewill Baptists, with whom Hutchins was affiliated. Although these two groups had developed completely independent of each other, they shared a similar belief system and both had finally chosen the name which was first used by their opponents.

The Transition to New Leadership

When Joseph Parker, who had organized and nurtured the General Baptist congregations in the area of Greene and Lenoir counties, died in 1791 or 1792, the future leadership of these churches rested with a young man whose origin is obscure. James Roach is listed in Asplund's *Register* in 1790, where he is identified as a Baptist minister living in Craven county. His name follows that of James Brinson, who was listed as an ordained minister and probably the pastor of Goose Creek Regular Baptist Church. The fact that James Roach's name is in italics indicates that he was unordained or a licensed preacher. Even though Goose Creek Church is listed as a member of the Kehukee Association, it must have had some members who held General Baptist sentiments, for we find that James Roach was soon living in Greene County and was serving as pastor of Wheat Swamp,

Louison Swamp, Gum Swamp and possibly other churches in that vicinity.⁷ How or when he was ordained we do not know, but it may have been soon after his removal to Greene County. It is possible that he was ordained by Joseph Parker before his death and was thus ready to assume the leadership of the Parker churches soon after the death of Parker. That Parker was still living in 1790 is indicated by the fact that he is listed in Asplund's *Register* as pastor of the General Baptist Church at "Cotankney Creek." The fact that the Regular Baptists had also organized a church at that location as well as one at Pungo, where no General Baptist church appears in Asplund's *Register*, suggests that the Regular Baptists had spared no effort in proselyting the General Baptists. Still, the General Baptist witness continued and soon would begin to flourish under a new generation of leaders. Of interest is the fact that in the earliest available list of Free Will Baptist churches in the General Conference, taken from the minutes of the conference in 1829, there were twenty-five churches in ten North Carolina counties and one in South Carolina.

Another of the ministers whose leadership was crucial in this period of the early nineteenth century was Elder Jesse Heath. Information concerning his early life is unavailable to us, but his later correspondence indicates that he received at least a basic education, which was more than most men of his generation in North Carolina. In 1827 he began a correspondence with the editor of the *Morning Star*, a weekly newspaper published by New England Freewill Baptists. His first letter to the editor was in response to an inquiry concerning the basic doctrines, practices, organization, and scope of the denomination in North Carolina. In his letter Heath recalled the fact that when he had entered the ministry twenty years before (in 1807) "there was but three ministers and five small churches, but bless the Lord, latterly we have been highly favored, and the work at this moment is gloriously reviving amongst us." We are able to identify with certainty only one of the three ministers mentioned by Heath, namely James Roach. Other possibilities include Howell Hearn, father of Rufus K. Hearn, Josiah Smith of Pungo, and John Winfield.⁸ That so

few ministers and churches were known to Heath in 1807 indicates the severity of the struggle for survival among the General Baptists during this period. Their light had almost been extinguished. Joseph and William Parker and John Winfield had carried the torch for more than a generation and now a new leadership was needed to restore confidence and give direction to the churches.

One thing urgently needed was more efficient organization. That need was met with the organization of a Free Will Baptist conference. The date of its beginning is unknown and how it began we can only surmise. Since there is no record of annual meetings being held during the last decades of the eighteenth century and no official records have survived until the annual conference of 1829,⁹ we can assume that the conference was meeting annually at least as early as 1812. In that year the conference thought it necessary "to examine and reprint the former confession of faith, put forth by the former Elders and Deacons." They also "thought it proper to annex a proper code of our discipline," by which they meant a constitution and rules of order for the conference, the constitution of a local church, a ceremony for the ordination of ministers, and a marriage ceremony. Elders James Roach and Jesse Heath were appointed to accomplish this task. Their work was completed and printed in New Bern by Salmon Hall in 1814.

The reference to "the former confession of faith, put forth by the former Elders and Deacons" alludes to the Confession of 1660, which is also known as "A Brief Confession or Declaration of Faith." That Elders Roach and Heath drew upon this document is apparent to anyone who examines it in comparison with certain articles in the 1812 document.¹⁰ The title which they gave to their work, "An Abstract of the Former Articles of Faith Confessed by the Original Baptist Church Holding the Doctrine of General Provision with Proper Code of Discipline," suggests that they wished to provide a statement of the essential doctrines which in their view the General Baptists now held without regard to the circumstances surrounding the composition of the confession of 1660. In general they omitted those articles which they felt were

no longer relevant to the situation in early nineteenth-century America and they abbreviated some articles where they could do so without loss of meaning. As can be seen from reading the Confession of 1660, especially the final paragraphs, that document was prepared in light of the confused situation at the end of the Cromwellian period in English history when old and new charges were being raised against Baptists, including charges of sedition and armed rebellion against civil authorities. English General Baptists were also anxious to preserve such religious liberties as they had enjoyed since the outbreak of civil war in 1640. Therefore, they restated the conviction which their leaders had held from the beginning:

That it is the will, and mind of God (in these Gospel times) that all men should have the free liberty of their own CONSCIENCES in matters of Religion, or Worship, without the least oppression, or persecution, as simply upon that account; and that for any in Authority otherwise to act, we confidently believe is expressly contrary to the mind of Christ, ... But in case the Civil Powers do, or shall at any time impose things about matters of Religion, which we through conscience to God cannot actually obey, then we with Peter also do say, that we ought (in such cases) to obey God rather than men; Acts 5.29.¹¹

Elders Roach and Heath understood that these conditions no longer applied in early nineteenth-century America, where freedom of religion was guaranteed by the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. They were more concerned to express the doctrinal content of General Baptist convictions in shorter form than the authors of the Confession of 1660. But in one instance their desire to state the essence of an article of faith in the Confession of 1660 resulted in a very different view of the doctrine of perseverance. We refer to Article X in the 1812 Former Articles, which reads: "We believe that the Saints shall persevere in grace, and

never finally fall away. John x, 27, 28 and 29." The authors of the Confession of 1660 had written:

That such who are true Believers, even Branches in Christ the Vine, (and that in his account whom he exhorts to abide in him, John 15.1, 2, 3, 4, 5.) or such who have charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of Faith unfeigned, I Tim. 1.5 may nevertheless for want of watchfulness swerve and turn aside from the same, vers. 6, 7, and become as withered Branches, cast into the fire and burned, John 15. 6. But such "who add unto their Faith Vertue, and unto Vertue Knowledge, and unto Knowledge Temperance," &c. 2 Pet. 1.5, 6, 7. such "shall never fall," vers. 8, 9, 10. 'tis impossible for all the false Christs, and false Prophets, that are and are to come, to deceive such, for they are "kept by the power of God, through Faith unto Salvation," I Pet. 1.5.¹²

Evidently, Elders Roach and Heath paid little attention to the first part of this article of faith, which has ample support in the New Testament; rather, they fixed upon the last part of it and stated what they understood to be the essence of it. Did they fail to realize that their statement of the doctrine of perseverance, brief and simple as it was, essentially agreed with the Calvinist view of perseverance, which held that the elect can never fall away because God has chosen them from the foundation of the world and saved them through his irresistible grace? Could they have unwittingly subscribed to this view that Regular Baptists held even while progressive Baptists would soon begin to soften such Calvinistic tenets as predestination and limited atonement? Because we cannot know the mind of these two men, we can only speculate why they chose to use such language in this article of faith. Could Elder Roach, who was identified as a licensed or unordained minister in the Goose Creek Regular Baptist Church in Asplund's *Register* in 1790, have retained at least this much of his Regular Baptist

background? Perhaps no single factor can account for the wording of this article.

It is of interest that in the annual meeting of the Bethel Conference in 1831 attention was drawn to Articles X and XI in the 1812 statement of faith. Although the printed minutes of that session have not survived, a record of the proceedings is found in Harrison and Barfield's *History of the Free Will Baptists of North Carolina*, Book Two, p. 169, which reads: "Resolved that the Tenth and Eleventh Articles of Confession of Faith be discontinued." Since there is no comment about this resolution, we can only conclude that the ministers and delegates present agreed that these articles did not represent the convictions held by Free Will Baptists less than two decades after they had been written by Elders Roach and Heath.¹³

At one other point Elders Roach and Heath displayed a willingness to subscribe to a view which was beginning to take hold among some Protestants in the early nineteenth century, and which was not expressed in the Confession of 1660. Article VII reads: "We believe the whole Scriptures are infallibly true, and that they are the only ruler of faith and practice." A comparison of this statement with the article on the Scriptures in the Confession of 1660 reveals that it is not only shorter, omitting as it does any reference to 2 Tim. 3:15 and other passages, but it adds an element which goes beyond the meaning expressed in the earlier document.¹⁴ Moreover, the wording of this article made Free Will Baptists more vulnerable to the argument that no articles of faith or rules of church government are needed, as will be seen in the next chapter. This is but one indication that confessions and creeds are written at particular times in the history of the Church and that they generally respond to issues which are important to their authors and the constituency which they represent. A comparison of the Confession of 1660 with the 1812 Articles of Faith demonstrates the necessity of revisions of such documents in light of important developments. It also illustrates the fact that such statements of faith represent approximations of the truth as revealed in the Scriptures and interpreted in the light of Christian

experience in different historical contexts.

Nevertheless, these two documents, the Confession of 1660 and the 1812 Articles of Faith, are important aspects of the heritage of Original Free Will Baptists and should be studied by all who desire to understand and appreciate that heritage.

Elder Jesse Heath's letter to the editor of *The Morning Star*, dated May 29, 1827, is another document which offers important information about the denomination in this period. As to the practices observed by Free Will Baptists in North Carolina Heath writes:

We baptize none but such as confess their sins, believe in Jesus, and consider baptism by immersion as a duty deeply impressed. We think that no person can feel baptism impressed on their minds as a duty, and still be in an unprepared state to comply with it. We have not been in the habit of practicing Open Communion, because no application has been made for liberty to eat and drink with us; but if any in good standing were to ask that liberty, they would not be denied. At our meetings we often invite others to the stage, and when invited we labor amongst them—We practice the imposition of hands on all newly baptized members, according to the examples of St. Peter, John, and Paul. We also practice washing of feet, believing it to be a gospel ordinance, but there is no compulsion if any are not disposed to wash with us, we do not compel them. We sometimes commune and wash feet in the day and sometimes at night.

Heath then refers to "a book of discipline" which contained articles of faith and other documents necessary for the ordering of church life in the conference as well as among local churches and the ministry. He describes the representation at annual meetings of the conference, noting that minutes were taken, printed, and distributed among the members. Commenting on the ministers

serving at that time in light of the recent growth in the membership of the churches, he added: "But I must tell you something of our situation in the ministry; we are all men of families, of little property and not a single scholar amongst us, so that the work is of God and not of us." The editor of *The Morning Star* added a footnote at the end of the letter in reference to Heath's words, "not a single scholar amongst us." It reads: "We presume that their privileges to obtain a common school education have not been so great in that country, as ours have been in this." The editor's presumption was correct. The General Assembly in North Carolina had made no appropriations for public education despite the fact that the State Constitution of 1776 had mandated the establishment of a school or schools "for the convenient Instruction of Youth, ..." (Article 41) The Assembly had been content to charter academies which were authorized to grant certificates and were operated by churches or individuals. Private education with a religious emphasis was the rule both before and after the American Revolution. Those who could afford to pay the tuition were the only ones who could attend these schools and this was usually limited to the children of planters and those in the professions. In the early decades of the nineteenth century opportunities for education showed no improvement. A combination of a weak economy, poverty, sparse population, poor transportation and little interest in learning, except for those who wished to enter the professions, resulted in widespread illiteracy. As late as 1840 it is reported that one-third of the adult whites were illiterate. The great majority of children, were growing up without any formal schooling, though some who could not attend an academy were being taught to read by parents or tutors. In rural areas the situation was worse than in towns like Raleigh or New Bern where academies were more accessible. "In 1826 Governor Burton reported that many well-informed observers believed it more difficult to obtain a primary education in North Carolina than it had been fifty years before."¹⁵

It is clear, therefore, that there must have been many men who entered the ministry during this period who had only the

rudiments of education. It could hardly have been expected of them to receive much learning in view of the limited opportunities available in eastern North Carolina and in many parts of the South. In fact, they were probably not disadvantaged by this as long as they were ministering to people who lacked the same benefits. Unfortunately, where ignorance abounds, there is a tendency for some to glory in it and to scorn those who seek knowledge. At the same time the lack of knowledge often makes the uninformed vulnerable to those who claim to have the truth and are anxious to convince others of their truth claims. This has happened more than once in the history of Original Free Will Baptists and it is hard to escape the conclusion that the lack of learning on the part of ministers and others in positions of leadership has been a major factor in the schisms and defections that have occurred at various times in their history. In addition, it later proved to be a handicap in the growth and expansion of the denomination when the larger society became more educated and seemed more willing to wrestle with the complexities of the modern world.

In the 1820's it is likely that Jesse Heath was out in front of most of his fellow ministers in his awareness of the world beyond North Carolina and his ability to communicate with other church leaders. In his letter from which the above quotation is taken he lists the names of "the most useful ministers" as follows: Frederick Fonville, Isaac Pipkin, Henry Smith, Levi Braxton, Nathaniel Lockhart, Reading (Redding) Moore, Jesse Alfin, Jeremiah Heath, Jeremiah Rowe, James Moore, and Robert Bond. Some of these names will appear again in the narrative of later developments in the nineteenth century. There were other ministers whose names do not appear on this list.

An item in the minutes of the Bethel Conference of 1832 gives further evidence of Elder Heath's literary qualifications. He and Elias Hutchins, who will be introduced later, "were appointed to publish a history of our connection in this and adjoining states." Heath was also "appointed to receive contributions for the expense of publishing said history." Such a history, if it had been written and preserved, would have added much to our knowledge of the

period under study even if it were limited to the author's memory and the oral accounts of others, together with the sparse records that would have been available to him.

When Elder Heath wrote to the editor of *The Morning Star* on May 29, 1827, there were real signs of revival among the Free Will Baptists in North Carolina. He could only give the membership figures which were reported to the conference in 1825—a total of 800—since all the churches were not represented at the conference in 1826 due to much sickness at the time. But, he added, "Latterly we have been highly favored, and the work at this moment is gloriously reviving amongst us." The following year on April 25 he noted in another letter to the editor that revivals had been experienced in as many as four churches with considerable additions in all of them and that "a gradual work appears to be progressing generally among us." On November 18, 1830, following the annual meeting of the conference, he reported to the *Morning Star* that the churches represented at the conference showed an increase of 660 members, and, he added, "The work of reformation in almost every part of the connexion is gloriously going on. The old and the young, the black and the white are the happy subjects of revival; and we rejoice most of all that, while other denominations are divided and party spirit and prejudice prevails, with us brotherly love continues."

These signs of vitality and growth among Free Will Baptists were part of a larger phenomenon which had brought religious excitement throughout the nation since the revivals on the frontier in 1800, which became known as the Second Great Awakening. This awakening began in such widely separated places as Connecticut, Virginia and Kentucky. On the campus of Yale and at Hampton Sydney and Washington Colleges in Virginia scores of young men experienced a religious conversion and many of them became the torch bearers of an awakening that was to have an impact on the entire nation. Freewill Baptists in New England, along with other denominations, including Baptists and Methodists, reaped a great harvest in the wake of it. In North Carolina the number of Baptists increased rapidly as new associations were

formed and the Baptist State Convention was organized at Greenville, North Carolina, in 1830.

The Original Free Will Baptist Conference reported a total of twenty-five churches, located in ten counties in North Carolina and one in Sumter District, South Carolina, in 1829. This represented an increase of twenty-one churches since 1807 as reported by Jesse Heath. During the following year there were substantial additions to the membership of these churches, and the list of counties where these churches were located indicates that they were widely scattered across the east-central section of the state. Therefore when the conference met at Grimsley Church, Green County, in 1830, Elder Jesse Heath offered a motion that the conference be divided for the convenience of those attending. Travel by any means was difficult in eastern North Carolina in those days and the increase in the number of churches over a wide area seemed to warrant such a division. It was agreed that there would be an eastern division consisting of thirteen churches to be called the Shiloh Conference and a western division comprised of the remaining churches to be known as the Bethel Conference. The next annual meeting of the Shiloh Conference was to be held at Pungo River Church and the contributions made by these churches in 1830 were to be paid to their appointed treasurer, Thomas J. Latham of Concord Church in Beaufort County. Unfortunately, the minutes of the Shiloh Conference during the next several years have not survived so that we know very little about these churches during the decade of the 1830's.

On the other hand the Bethel Conference convened the following year at Probability Church, Duplin County, a church not previously mentioned in the surviving records. As in the past Elder Heath delivered the introductory sermon by request made at the previous annual session. Each year the conference chose a moderator and a clerk at the beginning of the business session and a finance committee and other necessary committees were appointed. Elder James Moore was chosen as moderator and Thomas Hood as clerk.

Elder James Moore was born on March 20, 1793, in Edge-

combe County, the part of Edgecombe which later was included in Wilson County when the latter was formed in 1855. After his marriage he and his bride moved to Greene County where he became a member of Grimsley Church. He was called to preach and was licensed by his church in January 1825 and ordained to the ministry in February 1827. He shared the platform with Elders Heath and Levi Braxton in the organization of the Free Will Baptist Church at Hookerton in 1830 and served as its pastor from 1830 until 1837. After serving as pastor of several churches he was elected as pastor of Free Union Church in Green County, organized in 1843. It was a growing church and his name was soon added to the list of its members. He continued to serve as the pastor of this church for many years. He was a faithful minister of the gospel for fifty-three years and his role in the life of the denomination during that period was significant as the record will show.¹⁶

During the 1831 session of the conference, Elder Redding Moore requested by motion that the Free Will Baptist churches in South Carolina associated with him be dismissed and authorized to form an annual conference in that state. Elder Moore had moved to the Marion District of South Carolina in 1816 and in that same year he was ordained to the ministry. Since then he had been actively engaged in evangelizing in that and adjoining districts. His work represented the beginning of Free Will Baptist activity in the state and now he was convinced that the time had come to organize a new conference. The Bethel Conference agreed and appointed Jesse Heath and Robert bond as messengers to the new conference to offer encouragement and support. The following year (1832) at the meeting of the Bethel Conference care was taken to receive information from the South Carolina Conference and Elder Jesse Vause was appointed to write a letter informing them of the proceedings of the Bethel Conference. Such exchanges of information were typical among Free Will Baptists at this time and a proposal was made to initiate a monthly paper for the benefit of the churches in North Carolina. Elder Jesse Heath was asked to ascertain the feasibility of publishing such a paper at a cost to

subscribers of one dollar per year. The records fail to indicate any further action on this matter; however, the fact that some had subscribed to *The Morning Star* and were following events among New England Free Will Baptists must have created interest in the possibilities of a similar church paper. Another possible influence from the New England brethren was the idea of employing itinerant preachers to visit and evangelize other communities where the Free Will Baptist message had not yet been heard. Itinerant preachers were common in New England and the Freewill Baptists there had seen positive results of this method of evangelism. Thus the Bethel Conference chose two men, Elders Robert McNab and Lewis Hartsfield, to serve as itinerant preachers during the following year, each to be paid one hundred and fifty dollars for his services. The clerks of the churches were asked to obtain subscriptions for the support of these men, such subscriptions to be paid by individuals to the church clerks once every three months.

Visit of Elias Hutchins

One of those itinerant Freewill Baptist preachers who was active in New England and beyond was Elias Hutchins, who was born in New Portland, Maine, on June 5, 1801.¹⁷ His education was limited to no more than two terms at the log school house in the town where he grew up. At age seventeen, while attending a religious service conducted by his uncle, Samuel Hutchins, the young Elias felt the burden of his sins and requested prayer at the close of the meeting. Although he received no assurance of the forgiveness of his sins, he nevertheless committed himself to live a new life. He was baptized by his uncle in February 1819 and united with the church in New Portland. On January 18, 1823, he was licensed to preach at the Farmington Quarterly Meeting after which he began his itinerant work. A year later he was ordained as an evangelist at Wilton, Maine. At first his travels were confined to northern New England but in November 1826 he began his first preaching tour to the West, a journey that would take him

to Ohio and Indiana, where he labored as an itinerant preacher for the next two years. At the end of that tour he returned to New England to attend the Second General Conference of Freewill Baptists, held at Sandwich, New Hampshire.

On October 6, 1829, Hutchins began a journey to Boston and there boarded a ship which took him to North Carolina. After stops along the way he arrived at New Bern on the night of October 23. There he was greeted by friends and for the next four days he conducted religious services in New Bern, where large congregations came to hear him. He left New Bern on October 28, looking for the home of Elder Jesse Heath, who had corresponded with Hutchins but did not know that Hutchins had arrived in North Carolina. According to Hutchins' journal, their first meeting was interesting and productive but mostly one of consolation, for he felt that Free Will Baptist churches were spiritually at a low ebb.

On Saturday, October 31, Hutchins and Heath traveled together to Core Creek in Craven County to attend a quarterly conference at that church. There, as at New Bern, Hutchins found religion waning. A few days later Heath and Hutchins traveled several miles below New Bern to attend the annual meeting of the Free Will Baptist Conference at Bay River Meeting House on November 6-8, 1829. Hutchins was asked to prepare a circular letter on a subject of his choice to be attached to the minutes of this meeting.¹⁸ The conference voted to give seven dollars out of the general fund to Hutchins. In his journal he reports that he was pleased with the business of the conference. He also observed that at this time a plague of sickness was taking its toll in Bay River. Four men who had attended the conference died within a few days after it ended.

Two men from Chatham County, Elders Gunter and Hays, representing the Christian Connection, attended the Free Will Baptist Conference that year and were joyfully received. The Christian Connection began in 1792 when James O'Kelly led a group of churches in Piedmont North Carolina and Virginia out of the Methodist Episcopal Church on account of his objection to the

hierarchical authority in that body, specifically its increasingly centralized control and the powers given to the bishops. Known also as the Southern Christian Church, it was sometimes mistakenly identified with the Disciples of Christ or Campbellites, which is what happened in Harrison and Barfield's account of the initial visit of Gunter and Hays to the Conference of Free Will Baptists in 1829. In fact, the two groups shared certain principles, including adherence to the Bible as the only guide in matters of faith and practice and the abandonment of all denominational labels in the interest of Christian unity. Because these messengers from the Christian Connection held such convictions as these, they undoubtedly helped to prepare the way for what happened later when the Disciples movement managed to "convert" a number of Free Will Baptist ministers and divide several congregations over the issues which they introduced into the denomination.

A week after the meeting of the Free Will Baptist Conference at Bay River Elders Heath and Hutchins were joined by Elders Gunter and Hays on a tour that took them about sixty miles into the back country. During this tour they visited several churches and conducted services at which the congregations numbered about 200 in attendance on week days and on Sunday nearly one thousand. Those who gathered at these locations included both blacks and whites. At one such meeting, Hutchins reports, there were over 500 black people who came to hear "the man from the North." This was likely on Sunday since that many blacks (slaves) could hardly have come together on any other day of the week.

At the end of the tour on November 16, 1829, Hutchins was a guest in the home of Thomas Hood of Lenoir County. Although he wanted to take a much needed rest and do some writing, by the end of the day the house was filled with people from the surrounding neighborhood who were anxious to hear him speak. He had come to the South to meet and enjoy the fellowship with North Carolina Free Will Baptists, but he had also come in hopes of improving his health. Now he needed to relax after several days of travel but rest would have to come later for him. That evening he preached to the crowd that had gathered to hear him. The

following night another crowd gathered at the home where he was staying and again he preached. During the next two weeks he was busy attending meetings at various locations in Craven and Lenoir counties. Among the places where he preached were Louson Swamp and Wheat Swamp churches, both in Lenoir County. He reports that large congregations gathered to meet him at Louson Swamp, which must have been located near the home of Mr. Hood, his host.

On Monday, December 7, 1829, Hutchins and Mr. Hood began a journey to South Carolina, traveling on horseback. Toward evening on the first day he preached to a "well behaved congregation in a place mostly destitute of preaching." The place must have been in the vicinity of Whitehall, which is now Seven Springs on the Neuse River, for the next day Hutchins and his companions were at Indian Springs in Wayne County where there was a Free Will Baptist Church which was a member of the Conference. There he filled an appointment which brought joy to the saints while sinners felt their need of Christ. He reports that several were baptized.

On Saturday, December 12, Hutchins arrived at Mount Elon in Darlington District, South Carolina. There, in company with a Calvinistic Baptist preacher, he held a two-day meeting. The following Wednesday he arrived in Marion District, where Elder Redding Moore lived and was well received. Redding Moore was a Free Will Baptist minister who had moved to this area in 1816 and was for the past thirteen years the only preacher of "free salvation" in that district. Since Moore was still a member of the conference in North Carolina in 1829, Hutchins had desired to meet him and to learn more of his work in South Carolina. Moore was much encouraged by Hutchins' visit, though he did not visit Moore's church, which was thirty miles away. This was his only visit to South Carolina and it lasted but a few days.

On December 21 he set out on his return trip to Lenoir County, North Carolina, and arrived on the evening of Christmas Day. The next day he attended a quarterly meeting at Bethel Church, which was not far from Louson Swamp Church. He

wrote in his journal, "The Quarterly Meeting was attended with much solemnity and with obvious manifestations of the Divine presence." He also observed that whereas the neighborhood had formerly been "filled with dissipation of almost every description" a revival had recently taken place which "produced a great change in the morals of the place." In his lyrical style he added, "The obscene songs of the drunken and lascivious had given place to the sweet music of Zion; prayer had taken the place of swearing and lying; the Sabbath, formerly a day of drinking and gambling, of fighting and horseracing, was religiously observed; and the salutary influences of pure religion were too obvious to be denied by its most inveterate enemies."

Despite his tendency to describe in glowing terms the fruits of his labors among the Free Will Baptists of eastern North Carolina, this itinerant evangelist from New England was among the very few who traveled so far to visit these humble people at this early date to learn more about them and to join hands with them in reaping a harvest of souls. . Later he would visit them again and perhaps contributed to the fact that for a few years the New England Freewill Baptists would list the Bethel and Shiloh conferences in the minutes of their General Conference.

Bethel Conference Continued

At the meeting of the Bethel Conference in 1832, Heath shared a letter which he had received from Elder Jesse Lane of Indiana, a member of the General Baptist Association in southern Indiana and Kentucky. Elder Benoni Stinson is credited with organizing the Liberty Church near Evansville, Indiana, in 1823. Other churches were soon organized and the Liberty Association was formed with four churches in 1824. These General Baptists clearly had roots in North Carolina and Virginia and the letter from Elder Lane appears to support this assumption. The Bethel Conference agreed to invite the Liberty Association to be represented at its next annual session and appointed Elder Jesse Heath to continue his correspondence with Elder Lane.

Such interest in the work of other denominations of like faith as well as the desire to evangelize other communities in the state and to publish information concerning these and other topics suggests that despite the difficulties involved in accomplishing these objectives, there was a spirit of optimism and good will in the Bethel Conference. During the next few years that spirit seemed to prevail as the churches continued to report gains in membership and as relations between the Bethel, Shiloh, and South Carolina conferences were nurtured by the visits of leading ministers and the sending of messengers to attend each of the annual conferences. These annual conferences usually lasted three or four days during which time the visiting ministers and delegates (two from each church) stayed in the homes of members of the host church or camped out in wagons which had brought them to the site. Since they were held in the fall (the Shiloh Conference in mid-October and the Bethel Conference in early November), the weather was usually mild and sudden storms were less likely to occur at this time of the year. Farmers had harvested most of their crops by this time, which, if the seasons had been favorable, would give reason to be thankful. Likewise, if there had been successful revivals in the churches, even some of them, this would be a matter of much interest to those attending the conference. There was always much preaching during the four-day meeting, beginning with an introductory sermon, delivered by a minister who had been chosen for that honor at the previous annual meeting. It was common practice that the person who delivered the introductory sermon was then chosen as moderator for that annual session, though this did not always happen. Each day it was decided who would "fill the stage" on the following day, that is, who would preach during the next day's session. Sometimes visiting brethren were called upon to preach from the "stage," but more often the speakers were chosen from among the well-known members of the conference. Hymn-singing was a feature of these meetings, just as it was in the local churches, for Free Will Baptists loved to sing and even published their own hymnbooks several times during the nineteenth century. Since these hymn-

books contained only the words with no musical notes provided, the leader's role was all important. He must be able to pitch the tune correctly and "line" the words as they were sung without instrumental accompaniment. Spontaneous prayers and words of praise were offered at various times during these annual meetings as the ministers and delegates, along with members of the host congregation, listened to the sermons and testimonials of preachers and laypersons alike. There were doubtless frequent reminders of the way in which sinners walk and of the harvest of their deeds, as well as the bliss of the saved who are on their way to heaven. Although the conversation and the fellowship at such gatherings was perhaps more often centered around religious themes, it could also involve the mundane and ordinary details of the struggle to maintain families and farms in what was then the backwoods of eastern North Carolina. Whatever the topics of conversation during the breaks and after each day's session, the opportunity to renew friendships and to make new friends among the brethren was surely a highlight of these annual meetings, which many would not miss unless they were providentially hindered. There were times, as Elder Heath noted in his letter to *The Morning Star* in 1827, when sickness affected the number of churches represented at the annual conference and the number of ministers and delegates in attendance would naturally be fewer. Those who could be present would likely regard such an experience not only as an opportunity for relief from the drudgery and the boredom of their daily lives but also as a taste of the joys which they could anticipate at the end of life's journey.

The 1833 session of the Bethel Conference was held at Gum Swamp Church, one of the oldest churches in the conference which is still an active congregation today. There were elders and fraternal delegates from the Shiloh Conference who "were received with joy and invited to take seats with us." There were likewise messengers from the South Carolina Conference present at this meeting and they too were seated. At the proper time the letters from the churches represented were called for, read aloud at the meeting, and accepted by the body. This practice, which contin-

ued for a very long time at Free Will Baptist conferences, could take as much as two or more hours but it gave information to all those present concerning the spiritual welfare of each congregation. The ministers and delegates were especially interested in reports of revivals and of increases in church membership at this time. These revivals were the primary source of new converts and additions to the churches. As in other Protestant denominations in America throughout the nineteenth century Free Will Baptists had come to believe that revivals were the surest means of reaching the unchurched masses with the gospel and thus saving the nation from degradation and infidelity and guiding it on the path to its manifest destiny.

The idea that America was a chosen nation whose Christian witness would one day usher in the long awaited millennium had its roots in the Puritan heritage of those who settled New England and whose descendants experienced the revivals of the Great Awakening in the 1730's and 1740's. Jonathan Edwards, pastor of the Congregationalist Church in Northampton and a leader of the Awakening in New England, "saw the Awakening as the vindication, after many successive disappointments, of the earlier expectation that the final act of God's work of redemption would begin in America."¹⁹ This belief that God had a special destiny in store for America continued to be nurtured by the revivals in the early nineteenth century, which resulted in tens of thousands being added to the churches and a marked change in the moral climate of the nation. At the same time the impact of the revivals sent hundreds of men into the ministry, gave impetus to both home and foreign missionary activity, and fostered the beginnings of scores of academies and colleges throughout the nation. It also led to cooperation among larger denominations, especially in the North, in launching such reform and service organizations as the American Bible Society (1816), the American Sunday School Union (1824), the American Tract Society (1825), the American Temperance Society (1826), and the American Antislavery Society (1833).²⁰

Whether or not Free Will Baptists were fully aware of such

developments on the national scene, they were convinced of the value of revivals, for they had seen the remarkable growth in the number of their churches and the increase in membership which had taken place in the last twenty-five years. Part of that increase may have been the results of seeds sown as early as the evangelistic activity of Paul Palmer, the Parkers, and others of their generation. It is interesting to note that Free Will Baptist churches sprang up during the early nineteenth century in the very region of coastal Carolina where Paul Palmer had first preached the message of general atonement. Many of the churches in the Shiloh Conference were located in that area. However, most of the gains in church membership as well as the increase in the number of Free Will Baptist churches was the result of revivals during the 1820's and 1830's and the stimulus which such revivals gave to both ministers and the laity in the churches.

Chapter VIII

Disruption and Division

In Chapters V and VI, we described briefly the beginnings of several movements in American Christianity which have had some influence on the history of Original Free Will Baptists. One of these was the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) or more specifically that part of it which sprang from the "reformation" movement initiated by Thomas Campbell and his more aggressive son, Alexander Campbell. In his *Declaration and Address*, Thomas Campbell had set forth his views on the nature of the church and his conviction that Christian unity could be achieved by rejecting all creeds and confessions of faith and recognizing no other authority but the Scriptures as the rule of faith and practice. Alexander embraced his father's views but was more abrasive in his attacks on various denominations and was prepared to debate his views in print or in public disputations with any who opposed him. His views were first widely circulated through *The Christian Baptist*, which he edited from 1823 until 1827, after which he edited the *Millennial Harbinger* for several years. In December 1830 Thomas J. Latham, a Free Will Baptist of Pantego, North Carolina, subscribed to the latter publication and was thus introduced to "Campbellite" teachings. Latham, who had been designated as treasurer of the Shiloh conference in 1830 when that conference was formed by a division of the General Conference, was destined to become a leader among Free Will Baptists and would later use his influence in this small denomination to urge acceptance of Campbell's views.

Thomas J. Latham was born October 31, 1797, at Pantego and received his education at a private academy in Robeson County, where he learned well the art of communication.¹ Afterwards he taught school for about a decade. At some time prior to 1830 he confessed Christ at Pantego and was baptized by Elder Henry Smith. He helped to organize Concord Free Will Baptist Church on October 2, 1830, and was clerk of that church

for several years. Afterwards he served as pastor (presiding Elder) of the church from 1839 until 1855. As an elder he soon became an influential leader among his fellow ministers, for he was one of the most qualified men among them.

Thomas Campbell visited and preached in eastern North Carolina from November 1833 to April 1834. On March 11, 1834, he was at Hookerton, North Carolina, where among others he met David Hartsfield who had recently been ordained as in elder in the Free Will Baptist Church. His relationship with Hartsfield caused a stir in the Hookerton Free Will Baptist Church, for their church record for May 1834 contains the following item:

Elder David Hartsfield upon being charged with some connection with Elder Thomas Campbell's system, or his preaching moved to take the vote of the conference whether their feelings were hurt with him, after giving his statement of the case, voted that their feelings were not hurt with Elder Hartsfield.²

In April 1834 Thomas Campbell was entertained in the home of Thomas J. Latham. Apparently from that time Latham began using his influence to persuade his home church, Concord, and other Free Will Baptist churches in the Shiloh Conference to embrace the views of Campbell. By 1841 seven churches in the Shiloh conference were sending delegates to the Bethel Conference in which Disciples' principles were rapidly taking root and the leadership of the conference had fallen into the hands of men who held Disciples' convictions.

This movement toward endorsing the views of Campbell occurred after 1835, however, for in the meeting of the Bethel Conference held at Wheat Swamp Church that year a motion was passed which contradicted Disciples' principles. The motion stated "that a committee of five persons be appointed to revise our discipline and report to the next conference" Three of the men who were appointed to his committee were later among the leaders in the movement to embrace the views of Campbell. They were

Elder Robert Bond and two laymen, Winsor Dixon and Reuben Barrow. The following year the Bethel Conference met at Hookerton Free Will Baptist Church and the report of the committee, with some amendments, was accepted and ordered to be printed.

The action of revising the Discipline, which included the Articles of Faith, together with rules of church order, ran counter to the views of Campbell on the matter of rejecting all creeds and confessions of faith on the grounds that they were inspired by men and thus lacked the divine inspiration of the Scriptures. Such creeds and confessions were also regarded as stumbling blocks to the unity of the Church, the one body of Christ. The fact that the Bethel Conference then endorsed a slightly revised confession of faith in their meeting at Hookerton Church in 1836 was likely a source of embarrassment to those men who later openly advocated Disciples' principles and participated in the initial organization of the Disciples Convention in North Carolina, held at Hookerton in 1845.

Again, the relationship between the Free Will Baptists and the Southern Christian Connection, described briefly in Chapter VII, cannot be discounted as a factor in the shift toward Disciples' principles. At the meeting of the Bethel Conference in 1834 Elder Robert Bond moved "that we keep up a correspondence with the Christian Baptists (a name sometimes used to describe the Christian Connection) and that Elder Jesse Heath be appointed to correspond with them." Then in 1836, and again in 1837, Elder John Utley, from the Christian Conference, was seated as a fraternal delegate from that conference. In 1839 Elder Joel Clifton from the same conference was seated as a fraternal delegate and Elder Jacob Utley was chosen by the Bethel Conference as a delegate to the next meeting of the Christian Conference in North Carolina. It should be noted that like the Disciples, with whom the Christian Conference shared certain theological views, the Christian Conference would accept only the Scriptures as the rule of faith and practice. Thus it appears that Free Will Baptists, like many other denominations during this period, were willing to

cultivate relationships with other groups in order to express the unity of the Church as the body of Christ and to reduce the antagonisms so often associated with sectarian Christianity.

An example of the interest in developing fraternal relations with other groups may be seen in a letter directed to the Bethel Conference from United Baptists in Georgia. In this letter they requested that a correspondence between these two groups be initiated. The letter was taken before the conference and read to the ministers and delegates present at the meeting in 1839. It was then "laid on the table for a more deliberate consideration of the conference." Later it was brought back before the body for final action and the request was approved. Elders Robert Bond, Benjamin Parrott, and Jesse Vause were chosen as a committee to correspond with the United Baptists of Georgia. Such correspondence would enable each group to become more familiar with the faith and practices as well as the history and progress of the other. Beyond correspondence with groups in other states Free Will Baptists in North Carolina made no attempt to unite with such groups, even other Free Will Baptists, with the exception of the South Carolina Conference, until late in the nineteenth century. This in spite of the fact that during the first half of the nineteenth century North Carolina was losing much of its population because of migration to other states. People were moving west and south where land was cheap and there was plenty of room for population growth. New states were being added to the Union and those who had taken up residence elsewhere in the South were writing to relatives and friends in North Carolina with glowing reports of the advantages of settlement in other states. Some Free Will Baptists were included among those who sought to build a new life in states like Tennessee, Alabama, Georgia, Florida, Mississippi, and Texas. In 1838 the names of three men were removed from the list of ministers in the Bethel Conference because they had moved out of the state. Others would follow in later years. Such men and their families would likely become the nucleus of a Free Will Baptist church in the places where they settled.

A Shift Toward Disciples' Views

An important development occurred at the meeting of the Bethel Conference held at Fellow's Chapel, Pitt County, in 1839. The view that no articles of faith or principles of church government were needed except the Scriptures had been well received by many of those attending the Bethel Conference that year. Consequently, when this view became an issue among the ministers and delegates present, it prevailed over those who opposed it. We do not have sufficient information as to how the issue was raised, but Elder Jeremiah Heath was clearly disturbed by the fact that there was a growing sentiment among ministers of the conference against the fact that Free Will Baptists had long before agreed to a statement of faith and practice as well as rules for the government of the churches. Before the conference adjourned that year Elder Heath "moved that a demand be made that all the ministers confess that they will preach the doctrine and support the principles and practices of the Free Will Baptists and that this confession and pledge be inserted in the minutes." An overwhelming majority voted against his motion, in consequence of which Elder Heath requested that his name be removed from the minutes (apparently from the list of ministers). Elder Heath's name had been included in the list of "the most useful ministers" of the Free Will Baptist Conference in a letter written in 1827 by Elder Jesse Heath to the editor of *The Morning Star*. All that is known about Jeremiah Heath suggests that he was not an irrational man and that he could perceive the direction in which the conference was moving. The fact that he and other loyal Free Will Baptist ministers simply stopped attending the annual meetings of the conference made the outcome seem inevitable. Those who had opposed Elder Heath's motion either were not persuaded by whatever reasons might have been given to support it or they were swayed by the argument that no articles of faith were necessary as long as the Scriptures alone were taken as a sufficient guide to faith and practice. Such a view ignores the fact that from the beginning of Christianity, church leaders found it necessary to

state their position concerning the essential content of the gospel and issues relating to the conduct of believers. Then in the second century as the churches increasingly confronted other religious and philosophical views in the Greco-Roman world, it became necessary to adopt a rule of faith, such as the Apostles' Creed, and finally to come to some agreement on the limits of the New Testament canon of Scripture. During the second century and later, the Church also developed an ecclesiastical structure which gave increased authority to bishops who served as guardians of the faith. When Protestants, especially Baptists of every description, take the view that the Scriptures *alone* are a sufficient guide to faith and practice, they ignore the fact that there are different interpretations of Scripture and that this is one reason for the many forms of Protestantism in existence.

Apparently, no record of the minutes of the annual meeting of the Bethel Conference for 1840 has survived. We can assume that those who were sympathetic with Disciples' principles were likely in control and that some of the ministers in the Shiloh conference were present, among whom was Thomas J. Latham who by this time was an ordained elder. It is likely also that some churches in that conference, like Concord in Beaufort County where Latham was the pastor, were represented. Since a leading elder or layman was requested each year to prepare a circular letter to be attached to the minutes the following year, it is significant that Latham was asked to prepare such a letter to become a part of the minutes of 1841.

The fact that forty-three churches are listed in the minutes for the annual meeting of the Bethel Conference in 1841, including seventeen from Beaufort and Craven counties, suggests that an invitation was extended to all of the churches in the Shiloh Conference to be represented at this meeting.³ However, most of these churches did not send delegates. That year the conference convened at Piney Grove Meeting House, Sampson County, on November 11-14. Elder Lewis F. Williams introduced public worship and preached the introductory sermon. The first order of business was the election of officers. Winsor Dixon was chosen

as moderator, Elder John L. Clifton as assistant moderator, Reuben Barrow as clerk, and Joel Joyner, Jr. as assistant clerk. All of these men were later involved in the formation of the Disciples Conference in 1845. The majority of those present at this annual meeting were decidedly in favor of "Campbellite" views, for when Elder Thomas J. Latham's circular letter was read, it was approved and ordered to be attached to the minutes. Charles C. Ware describes it as "a philippic against creeds, a plea for Christian union, and Christian liberty."⁴ It contains several arguments against the use of creeds and confessions of faith, contending that "All Christians can unite on the Scriptures as the rule of Faith and Practice, and on them alone." In it Elder Latham cited Article 7 of the Free Will Baptist Articles which read: "We believe the whole Scriptures are infallibly true, and that they are the only rules of Faith and Practice" and endeavored to show that this article was in accordance with the practice of primitive Christians. This same article was also used by other spokesmen to argue that Free Will Baptists needed no articles of faith except the words of the apostles and the evangelists in the New Testament.

As a final blow to Free Will Baptist faith and order the conference proceeded to declare that it would hereafter be called the Bethel Conference of North Carolina. It was also agreed that Elder Thomas J. Latham would preach the introductory sermon at the next annual conference to be held at Welch's Creek Meeting House in Martin County. In his absence another strong advocate of Disciples' views, Elder Henry Smith, would deliver the sermon. With the decision to drop the Original Free Will Baptist denominational label from the name of the Bethel Conference, the Disciples' movement in North Carolina had scored a victory. In his *Tar Heel Disciples*, C. C. Ware treats the conference of 1841 as the beginning of the North Carolina Convention of Disciples of Christ. His narrative of the beginning of the Disciples of Christ among Free Will Baptists in his earlier *History of the Disciples of Christ in North Carolina* (1927) is treated as a natural development in the Bethel Conference, which vindicated the plea for Christian unity

that was so important to the early spokesmen of the Disciples movement. But a closer look at the record indicates that seeds of discord were sown which divided churches and created bitter hostility between the parties involved.

When the Bethel Conference met at Welch's Creek Meeting House on November 10, 1842, Elder Latham preached the introductory sermon based on the 17th chapter of the Gospel of John. Since this passage contains Jesus' prayer that his disciples may be one, the sermon was doubtless a plea for Christian unity. Latham was then chosen as moderator and Elder Robert Bond as assistant moderator. Reuben Barrow, a leading layman of Wheat Swamp Church, had prepared the circular letter for that session, which was approved and attached to the minutes. It, too, was an appeal for the union of all Christians on the basis of the Scriptures alone.⁵ Barrow observed that the seeds of discord and disunion were being sown amongst the brethren and urged that all should search the Scriptures and endeavor to conform to their divine precepts as the means of eliminating discord and establishing Christian love and fellowship. He declared that whatever ideas he may have formerly held on the subject of rules of discipline and doctrine, drawn up by some leading member or members of the church, he was now convinced that all rules of discipline and doctrinal formulas, "... written by uninspired men, are altogether useless and unprofitable; and that they are one great cause of the divisions and contentions which pervade the Christian world at the present day." His words are reminiscent of the argument which the Campbells and others had widely publicized during the past two decades. It is ironic that we have no evidence of discord and disunity in the Bethel Conference until these views were introduced by those who were influenced by the Campbells. Reuben Barrow himself had served on a committee which reported on a revision of the Discipline in the Bethel Conference in 1836. He had obviously been persuaded by the views of the Campbells after that date.

Only fourteen churches sent delegates to the Bethel Conference in 1842 and three were represented by letter, though forty-

three were listed as members. Clearly there was a decided loss of interest in the Bethel Conference, which had declared in 1841 that it would no longer be denominated as Free Will Baptist. The local churches were, in fact, wrestling with the issue of what to do about the influence of Campbellite views on the leaders of the Bethel Conference, who had abandoned the Free Will Baptist articles of faith and principles of church government. The dissension brought about by the propagation of these views had left many of the churches in an unsettled state and would subsequently lead to divided congregations with a faction in several churches deciding to remain with the Bethel Conference while another faction chose to maintain their identity as Free Will Baptists. Since the name Free Will Baptist had been formally adopted by the conference as late as the 1820's, it may have been easy for some to be convinced that denominational names are of little importance and that only those names which are used in the New Testament to designate the followers of Christ should be used. Again, this was an argument of the Campbells.

That same year (1842) some leaders who wished to remain loyal to their traditions as Free Will Baptists (of the General Baptist heritage) were engaged in persuading as many churches as possible to be represented at a meeting to be held at Louson Swamp Church in Lenoir County. This meeting may have been held at the time when the Shiloh Conference was scheduled to meet. It was an effort to gather representatives from as many Free Will Baptist churches in the Bethel and Shiloh conferences as possible for the purpose of continuing the Free Will Baptist witness. The earliest minutes of this conference available to us are those of the annual meeting of the North Carolina Free Will Baptist General Conference held at Grimsley Church in Greene County in 1845 at which there were thirty-eight churches represented by delegate or by letter. The clerk of the Disciples faction at Hookerton, which consisted of twenty-eight members, referred to the 1842 meeting at Louson Swamp Church in their Minute Book for the month of May 1843 as "the Luzern Swamp Conference," which claimed to be the old Free Will Baptist Conference.⁶

He accused the latter of propagating party feelings and of attempting to "rend, split and pull down the churches of the Bethel Conference to build up this new conference." Earlier, on February 18, 1843, the same clerk had recorded in their minutes the following item: "Owing to some division in regard to a church Discipline the pastor (Robert Bond) moved to take the voice of the church to know which the church would take, the written discipline or the word of God, upon which it voted to take the word of God."⁷ One can imagine with what emotion the pastor may have acted when he put this matter to a vote as he held up the Bible in one hand and the book of discipline in the other and in a loud voice cried, "Will you take this written discipline or the word of God?" Sadly, too often issues of great importance have been treated in local congregations and church conventions in this manner. In this situation at Hookerton the pastor oversimplified the issue by his suggestion that the church was compelled to choose between the Bible and a source which offers guidance based on the teachings of the Bible and the best that church tradition has to offer in its interpretation of the Bible.

One of the leading exponents of Disciples' views, who labored first in Beaufort and Craven counties and in 1841 appears on the list of ministers in the Bethel Conference, was Elder Henry Smith (1789-1857). He was the son of Elder Josiah Smith, a General Baptist preacher and a native of the Pungo section of Beaufort County, the area where John Winfield, another General Baptist minister of the previous generation, provided a continuing Arminian Baptist witness.⁸ Smith was particularly successful as an itinerant evangelist in visiting congregations in Craven, Pamlico, and Carteret counties during the 1840's and shepherding some of them toward becoming members of the Disciples communion. For several years, beginning in 1842, his name appears at the head of the list of ministers in the Bethel Conference, later the Bethel Conference and Union Meeting of Disciples of Christ. This was doubtless because of his age and the esteem in which he was held as an evangelist.

A few months after the meeting at Louson Swamp Church of

those who desired to keep their Free Will Baptist identity, Elder Henry Smith wrote letters to several Free Will Baptist ministers asking them to meet at Hookerton "commencing Friday before the third Lord's day in May next, (1843) at which meeting all the preachers & Brethren of our connexion are specially invited to attend, and in the spirit of the gospel to confer together upon all the points of difference which may be found to exist among them either in the faith or practice of the Christian religion." The letter which has survived is dated February 3, 1843, and was written in Lenoir County while Smith was "sojourning among the Brethren and sisters of several churches" in Greene and Lenoir counties.⁹ He writes, "It is true that I had heard of the schism in our body before I came here, but it is also true that I had very little idea of the unhappy condition of the churches in this region, before I had realized it by an interview with the dear and much [beloved] disciples of the meek and lowly Jesus." It was the opinion of Smith's sources that "this unhappy state of things" had developed out of a misunderstanding among the ministers and therefore they are "the proper persons to reconsider the matter and reconcile the churches composing our body." It is of interest that Smith never employs the name Free Will Baptist in his letter but studiously follows the practice of using only those names for the followers of Jesus which are found in the New Testament.

When the Bethel Conference convened at Wheat Swamp Meeting House on November 9-12, 1843, it was clear that the ministers and delegates consisted mainly of those holding Disciples' convictions. Only fourteen churches were represented by delegate and seven by letter at this annual meeting. Harrison and Barfield make this comment regarding the 1843 session: "At this conference, and the three following conferences, the volcano burst that had been burning for thirteen years." Unfortunately, they provide no other information concerning the actions taken at this meeting or the three annual meetings that followed except a comment on the "proselyting" activity of the Campbellites which resulted in the loss of twenty-five ordained preachers by 1847.¹⁰

The Disciples have preserved a more complete account of

actions taken during this period, due to the fact that Elder Thomas J. Latham was given the task of transcribing the minutes of the conference each year and seeing that they were printed and mailed to the churches.

One important item which was unanimously adopted at this session was a resolution submitted by Elder Latham which declared in the preamble that "Division among Christians is a promiscuous evil," followed by reasons in support of this assertion, and concluding with this statement:

Resolved that this Conference consider each Church of Christ, composed of its Elders, Deacons, and other members, as the highest ecclesiastical tribunal recognized in the New Testament, and therefore disclaims any ecclesiastical or controlling power over the churches of Christ as are willing to unite with us, on the Holy Scriptures, as the Rule of Faith and Discipline, reserving to themselves, respectively, the right to interpret the same, for their own regulations, and that they be affectionately invited to represent themselves by Delegates in this Conference.¹¹

This resolution was an appeal to all the churches of the Bethel Conference to come together under the umbrella of the principle of the *independence* of the local church, guided only by their own interpretation of the Scriptures in matters of faith and discipline. It was also an appeal to other Baptist churches to join them, for already the conference in 1842 had requested that Elder Latham "attend the Union Meetings of certain churches in Martin, Pitt, and Beaufort Counties."¹² Clearly this is in reference to a group of Regular Baptist churches which had severed relations with the Kehukee and Neuse Associations and had formed a union meeting based on their assent to Disciples' principles, which had set them at odds with their Baptist brethren.¹³

The Bethel Conference convened on October 10-13, 1844, at Hookerton, Greene County, a month earlier than in previous years.

Elder Henry Smith preached the introductory sermon and Elder Latham was elected moderator. Only ten churches sent delegates to this conference and nine were represented by letter. Three of the latter were received into the conference that year: Ware Creek in Carteret, Chocowinity in Beaufort, and Broad Creek in Craven, all located in the coastal area of North Carolina.

Elder Robert Bond submitted a resolution at this conference, proposing that a convention be held at Hookerton the following May 1845 "for the purpose of effecting a union between the Churches of Christ in this Conference and such other Churches of Christ as are willing to unite on 'The Faith once delivered to the Saints.'" If there was any possibility of reconciling the differences between those who wished to remain loyal to the Free Will Baptist Church with its General Baptist heritage and those who had embraced Disciples' sentiments, the passage of this resolution had eclipsed it. The leadership of the Bethel Conference had prepared the way for a merger with the Union Meeting of Disciples of Christ, which consisted of a half-dozen small Baptist congregations in four neighboring counties. These few congregations of Regular Baptists had been persuaded to renounce all creeds and take the Scriptures alone as their rule of faith and practice. They had held their first convention at Little Sister Meeting House, Lenoir County, on March 28-30, 1834, and organized the Union Meeting of Disciples of Christ.

Representatives of the Bethel Conference and of the Union Meeting of Disciples convened for the purpose of merging these two organizations on May 2, 1845. They resolved to unite on condition that the member churches "shall claim no other name than that of Churches of Christ; and that they shall take the Bible alone as their only Rule of Faith and Practice, and discard as entirely useless all human creeds, traditions or commandments of uninspired men."¹⁴ What was called a "reformation" among contemporary Disciples in America had now been effected in North Carolina. The movement had begun as an attempt to unite all Christians by means of a restoration of primitive Christianity, based on an allegiance to the New Testament as the sole sufficient

guide to faith and practice. In the end it added one more to the list of denominations in America competing with one another, though it must be said that the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) today continues to have a strong ecumenical emphasis with a different perspective.

The first annual meeting of the newly formed "Bethel Conference and Union Meeting of the Disciples of Christ," as they then designated themselves, was held at Piney Grove Meeting House, Sampson County, on October 9-12, 1845. Twelve churches sent delegates to this historic meeting and seven represented by letter, though a total of thirty churches were listed on the roll of churches. Gum Swamp Church, Pitt County, for example, was still on the list but it had not represented by delegate or by letter since 1841. Although the Disciples movement in North Carolina would later show a steady increase, it was too involved in controversy in its infancy to enjoy the level of growth that its leaders may have hoped for.

The dissension created by the advocacy of Disciples' views among Free Will Baptists had resulted in brother being set against brother and churches being divided into factions. Since most of these churches held meetings for worship only once a month, or even once a quarter, the Free Will Baptist group and the Disciples group would share the same meeting house and simply hold their quarterly conferences and meetings for worship at different times. Because the Disciples came to believe that they should meet to partake of the Lord's Supper on every Lord's day, they later insisted on the erection of their own places of worship rather than share a common meeting house. For several years, however, some local churches with the same name were represented in the Bethel Conference and Union Meeting of Disciples of Christ and in the General Conference of Original Free Will Baptists. It is clear that these were opposing factions which had become separate congregations, the one identifying itself as Free Will Baptist and the other as Disciples of Christ. In these divided churches the Disciples were as a rule a minority of the original congregation. At Hookerton, for instance, where Thomas Campbell had visited

and had introduced his views in March 1834, a Disciples faction represented in the annual meeting of the Bethel Conference and Union Meeting of Disciples of Christ in 1845 with a membership of forty-one while the Free Will Baptist faction at Hookerton claimed a membership of 116 as indicated in the minutes of the General Conference for that same year. Harts in Greene County (now Marlboro Church in Pitt County) had a Disciples congregation of fifteen and a Free Will Baptist congregation of thirty-six. Woodington in Lenoir County had a Disciples congregation of fifteen, a Free Will Baptist congregation of eighty. The most notable exception was Wheat Swamp, Lenoir County, which reported a Disciples congregation of 175 while the Free Will Baptists numbered 128. The Free Will Baptist congregations at both Wheat Swamp and Hookerton eventually ceased to function as churches in the 1860's, partly because of the lack of pastoral leadership but also because of the ravages of the Civil War and its aftermath which left many rural churches impoverished and unable to survive. On the other hand at least three congregations: Post Oak (changed to Vanceboro in 1894) in Craven County, Long Branch in Cumberland County, and Chocowinity in Beaufort County, were dropped from the list of Disciples churches in 1852 because they had decided to affiliate with the Free Will Baptist Conference.¹⁵ Although Piney Grove Church in Sampson County was the site of the Bethel Conference in 1841 and again in 1845 and this church was represented at most of the annual meetings as late as 1852, it later became identified with the Regular Baptists and is now a Southern Baptist church.

Some ministers who at first identified with the Disciples were later dropped from their list of elders because they had decided to cast their lot with the Free Will Baptists. These included Thomas Reaves, Wilson Daniels, Henry W. Mears, and Jeremiah Rowe in 1844 and Thomas C. Baker and Fred B. Silverthorne in 1847. Stephen D. Collins left the Free Will Baptist Conference in 1847, joined the Disciples in 1848, was a member of the South Carolina Free Will Baptist Conference in 1858, was admitted to the Cape Fear Free Will Baptist Conference that same year, and was

dropped from their list of ministers in 1859. The name of William C. Gardner was dropped from the Disciples' list of elders in 1846 because he had united with the Missionary Baptists and the name of Jordan Cox was dropped because he had joined the Methodist Church. All of these men had once been on the list of elders in the Bethel Conference which had aligned itself with the Disciples movement.

Aside from these examples of division in local churches and realignment of some ministers and churches, the relationship between Free Will Baptists and Disciples was not entirely negative during the next several years. Fraternal delegates from the Disciples continued to attend annual meetings of the Free Will Baptist Conference and Free Will Baptist ministers were occasionally seated at annual meetings of the Disciples of Christ.

The North Carolina Original Free Will Baptist General Conference met at Grimsley's Meeting House, Greene County, on November 6-9, 1845. Elder Thomas Moore was chosen as moderator and Elder Calvin Ruff as clerk. There were thirty-eight churches listed in the table of churches; thirty-five were represented by delegate or by letter. The total membership of the churches listed was 2,086 with 195 baptized and forty received by letter or statement during the past year. The names of thirty-one ministers appeared on the list of elders and preachers with Jeremiah Heath's name at the head of the list. Since the complete minutes of this session are the earliest available to us, the record of this annual conference is of considerable importance. Not only does it enable us to compare figures with the record of the Bethel Conference and Union Meeting of the disciples of Christ in 1845 as shown above, but it reveals the fact that despite the losses to the Disciples movement the Free Will Baptist Conference was still a vital organization, capable of continuing growth. That growth continued into the next decade as the churches reported to the conference each year the number of new additions by baptism or by letter. Louson Swamp Church, for example, reported a total of 115 additions in 1850 and others reported large increases.

Controversy over Secret Societies

While the General Conference was enjoying harmony and local churches were showing signs of rapid growth, another issue was beginning to intrude upon the progress of the denomination. Some ministers and laymen in the churches had joined the Free Masons while others were opposed to membership in any secret societies. Some of the oldest Free Will Baptist ministers, among them Elder James Moore, considered membership in such societies a great sin, for they said, "Christ did nothing secret."¹⁶ Therefore, in 1847 when the conference met at Hood Swamp Church, Wayne County, a resolution was introduced which declared the conference to be separate from all such societies. This prompted a spirited debate, evidently because some ministers and laymen present were already members of the Masons. Even though the resolution passed, the controversy did not end there. Harrison and Barfield add this comment: "But, strange to say, some of those who were active in this resolution were the cause of the division that took place in after years."¹⁷

It should be pointed out that the Free Will Baptists were not the only people who felt the impact of the Masonic movement. There was a storm of controversy over the issue of membership in the Masons two decades earlier when a man's body was pulled out of a river in New York state who had allegedly made public the secrets of Free Masonry. However, this controversy did not seem to affect the Disciples in North Carolina, who were in close proximity to the Free Will Baptists. It was reported that Elder Gideon Allen's name was removed from the list of elders in the Free will Baptist conference in 1850 because he had united with the Disciples and had joined the Masons.¹⁸ He had, in fact, been received into the Disciples conference when it convened at Rountree's Meeting House, Pitt County, in October of that year.

When the Free Will Baptist Conference met at Wheat Swamp, Lenoir County, in 1850, Elder Calvin Ruff moved that the resolution adopted by the conference in 1847 regarding secret societies be expunged from the record. His motion was carried.

Then another resolution was presented by Elder Jesse Vause which declared "that each individual church belonging to the Free Will Baptist General Conference hold its own business without the General Conference having any control over it further than that of an appeal."¹⁹ The intent of this motion was to give each local church the right to decide whether or not it would receive new members or dismiss members who were members of the Masonic Order since it was obvious that some ministers and some laymen had united with that organization while others had determined not to have fellowship in their churches with members of the Masonic Order. By this time the leadership in the churches had begun to take a hard line on this issue and were not disposed to work out a compromise. The right of appeal to the General Conference by an aggrieved individual in a local church meant that this issue could again be brought before the General Conference. The result was confusion in the minds of many and the likelihood that the controversy would continue unabated.

At the next annual conference, held at Free Union, Greene County, in 1851 the issue of secret societies was again brought up. Elder Calvin Ruff moved to rescind the resolution adopted at the last annual conference and alter it to this effect: "That no member shall be excluded or any person debarred from becoming a member of any church belonging to this connection, for being or becoming a member of any of the following orders: Free Masons, Independent Order of Odd Fellows, or Sons of Temperance."²⁰ His motion was adopted. The effect of this resolution was, once again, to involve the conference in the matter of receiving or dismissing members of a local church. Such an action would likely result in heating up the controversy rather than resolving it.

Unfortunately, only one brief paragraph is devoted to the actions taken by the conference the following year in Harrison and Barfield's account and there is no other record of the minutes of that session available to us. One item of business was the repealing of the resolutions passed in 1851, "causing great dissatisfaction with the friends of them; thus the seeds of division

were sown which bore fruit at the next conference."²¹ One can only imagine the degree of hostility that had developed over this issue since it was first introduced at the conference meeting in 1847.

The conference met at Free Union, Martin County, in 1853. It was there that the bitter fruit of six or more years of controversy ripened to harvest. Elder Hiram G. Paul, who preached the introductory sermon, was chosen as moderator and other officers and standing committees were either elected or appointed. The first item of business was a resolution presented by Elder Alfred Moore which stated that "no church belonging to this conference *shall be at liberty* to reject any person applying for membership, or excommunicate any member on the grounds that he belongs to the order of Free Masons or of Odd Fellows." A proposal to amend the resolution by adding the words "unless a majority of the members shall so decide" was rejected by Elder Alfred Moore. Before his motion was voted on by the body, Elder James Moore, who had refused to accept members of secret societies in his churches, introduced another resolution "giving to each church its own key — the privilege of transacting its own business." According to Harrison and Barfield, the moderator refused to allow the second resolution to be placed before the house, whereupon Elder James Moore put it to a vote. The official minutes for that year simply state that both resolutions were voted on. "Elder Alfred Moore's resolution, without the amendment, received thirty-six votes, and that of Elder James Moore received sixty votes." At this point there was great confusion in the body and the conference adjourned until the following day.

When the conference convened the next day, the tempest had not calmed. There was such a spirit of disunity among the ministers and delegates that it seemed impossible to continue as one body. Elder James Moore invited those who wished to continue the conference on the basis of its Articles of Faith and Rules of Discipline to retire and reorganize. This majority faction then withdrew, elected its officers, and proceeded to adopt still another preamble and resolution based on an article in the

"Constitution of the Annual Conference" which states, "All matters shall be decided by a majority." As is clear from their proceedings in previous years, a majority vote of the conference had not resolved the issue of secret societies or Free Masonry in particular.

There are times when other means of resolving issues must be sought than that of bringing resolutions before a church conference or convention. When a faction or group within a conference or convention takes an absolutist position on an issue concerning which there is honest disagreement among Christians, then disunity and possible division of the body may well occur.

It was the James Moore faction which eventually continued as the Original Free Will Baptist Conference, not only because it represented the majority view but also because it was in agreement with the constitution of the conference. The other faction also met and organized a Free Will Baptist conference which also claimed to be the Original Conference. It continued to meet annually for a few years. Some of their ministers later returned and were readmitted to the James Moore group while others sought affiliation with other groups, including one known as Union Baptists. This denomination was founded by James W. Hunnicut of Fredricksburg, Virginia, whose aim was to unite all Open-Communion Baptists into one body.²² He organized several churches of this faith in eastern North Carolina and was instrumental in leading others to join the movement. Because of his opposition to the Confederacy during the Civil War, he was forced to leave the South. These churches were then led by Bushrod Washington Nash under whose leadership the movement declined and finally perished. One of the churches that later affiliated with the Union Baptists was Louson Swamp, Lenoir County, which reported a total membership of 274 in 1857. This church was host to the Original Free Will Baptist Conference when it met in 1842 to regroup, following the decision of the Bethel Conference in 1841 to discontinue the use of the name Free Will Baptist. Three ministers whose names were dropped from the list of elders in the James Moore group in 1853 were Gardner Holmes, William Harris, and Curtis Lee. These men were among the seven

ministers who led in the organization of the Cape Fear Free Will Baptist Conference at Stoney Run church on November 1-4, 1855. (See Chapter IX) Only seventeen ministers and twenty-one churches are listed in the minutes of the Original Conference (Elder James Moore faction) in 1853 as compared to the figures for 1851, which show that thirty-six ministers and forty-five churches were enrolled that year. The controversy over secret societies had dealt another devastating blow to the denomination, one which carried with it painful memories for years to come.

There is little evidence in the record of proceedings during this period that conference leaders considered the issues involved in this controversy in a spirit of openness with a willingness to reason together and a genuine desire to resolve the matter before it led to division. It must seem to an outside observer at this late date that no great principle was at stake which would make such a division inevitable. Whether or not there were personal conflicts involved or other issues in the background is not made clear from extant records. Nevertheless, a comparison of the minutes of the two factions in their annual conferences in the year 1857 reveals that there were two factions in a few local churches which represented in the two different conferences, both of which met on the same dates, November 5-8, 1857. This indicates that even some local churches were seriously divided over the issue of secret societies.

At the annual conference in 1853 the name of Rufus K. Hearn was added to the list of ministers. He was born October 20, 1819, the son of Elder Howell Hearn and his wife Sarah.²³ He married the daughter of Richard Reaves on November 12, 1846, and united with Gum Swamp Church on November 25, 1850, remaining a member of that church until his death. On August 1, 1853, he was ordained as a minister of the gospel and was received into the conference that year. Although the future of the Free Will Baptist denomination may not have seemed bright at that time, Rufus K. Hearn was able during his ministry of four decades to see it grow and prosper beyond that of any other period in its history. His own talents and dedication to his denomination contributed much

to its success. As a faithful pastor, as recording secretary of the conference for many years, and as one who was able and willing to defend the doctrines of his church, he was among the stalwart leaders of the Free Will Baptist Church in his generation. Not least important is the fact that he was the first to write and publish a brief history of his denomination. His example and influence has been a source of inspiration to every generation of Free Will Baptists since his death on March 21, 1894, at the age of seventy-four.

In 1856 a resolution was passed at the conference which provided "that Brother Rufus K. Hearn be appointed to procure a book and keep a true record of all the business transactions of this and future conferences, and such other facts as may seem proper and right, together with a sketch of the lives of the several ministers composing the same."²⁴ The fact that in 1859 Elder Hearn was authorized to "draw five dollars out of the general treasury to purchase a book to keep a record of the proceedings of the General Conference" suggests that no action had been taken on the above proposal until that year. That the matter of maintaining an official record of conference proceedings was not neglected in later years may be seen by the appointment of a committee of three men in the 1870 session "to examine the record of the conference as kept by Elder R. K. Hearn, and said committee to say how much he shall have for his services." At the next annual session this committee reported that "the work done by Elder Hearn in keeping a record of the proceedings of the Free Will Baptist General Conference, and biographical sketches of deceased ministers ... contains a great deal of labor." They judged that he should be paid fifty dollars for his services and requested that the body should pass a resolution asking the treasurer to pay annually the sum of five dollars to the recorder for future services. In later years Elder Hearn was asked by the conference on several occasions to write a biographical sketch of a deceased minister to be included in the annual minutes of the conference. Some of these have been preserved in the volume published by Elders Thad Harrison and J. M. Barfield in 1897, entitled *History of the Free*

Will Baptists of North Carolina.

It must have been about 1880 that Elder Hearn began the preparation of a manuscript on the "Origin of the Free Will Baptist Church of North Carolina." It was likely published first in *The Free Will Baptist*, a weekly denominational publication, of which Hearn became editor in 1880. A copy of the manuscript was sent to D. B. Montgomery who used it in the preparation of his *General Baptist History*, published in 1882.²⁵ Harrison and Barfield also made use of his work in preparing their history of the denomination, quoting most of its contents without acknowledging their source.

Chapter IX

New Conferences Formed

An important event which occurred two years after the division of the General Conference in 1853 was the organization of the Cape Fear Free Will Baptist Conference. Delegates from eight churches and seven ministers convened at Stoney Run Church, Cumberland County (now Sampson County), on November 1-4, 1855, and organized the conference.¹ The original churches were Stoney Run, Long Branch, Free Union, Fayetteville, Shady Grove, Bethsaida, Prospect, and Elbethel. The total membership of these churches was 370. Stoney Run and Long Branch had been members of the General Conference. Four of the seven ministers enrolled at this first annual meeting had been members of the General Conference. One of these, Elder John Williams, was chosen as moderator. Elder James Turnage was elected as clerk and Thomas Avera was chosen as general treasurer. Action was taken at this first session to have "one hundred copies of a discipline printed," each church to pay a portion of the cost. In the absence of any surviving copy we may assume that the articles of faith were the same as those used by the General Conference though the Cape Fear Conference prepared its own constitution and rules of order, which were later recorded in a book procured for the purpose of recording the business of each annual meeting and other pertinent information. In the meeting of this conference in 1875 Elder James Turnage, one of the original ministers of the Cape Fear Conference was requested to furnish "an account of the origin and early history of the Cape Fear Free Will Baptist Conference, and that the recording secretary be instructed to enter the same upon the conference book of records, provided they be not found already recorded on said book." For reasons that are not given the minutes of the annual meetings from 1860 to 1865 are not recorded in this book. Since the nation was engaged in the Civil War during this period, this may help to explain the missing records, or more likely they were lost before

they could be recorded for posterity. That the Cape Fear Conference met annually during this difficult time may be seen from the fact that delegates were chosen by the General Conference to visit the Cape Fear Conference. Likewise, delegates from the Cape Fear Conference were seated at some annual sessions of the General Conference.

During the early decades of its history the Cape Fear Conference enjoyed a harmonious relationship with other Free Will Baptist conferences. At most annual sessions visiting delegates from the South Carolina Conference or the North Carolina Free Will Baptist General Conference were seated and the Cape Fear Conference usually reciprocated by appointing a delegate or delegates to these sister conferences. Also, action was taken in 1857 "to keep open a correspondence with the South Carolina Conference" by appointing Elders James Turnage and William Byrd to serve as a committee charged with this responsibility.

At the annual meeting of the Cape Fear Conference in 1858 Elders James W. Hunnicut and Bushrod W. Nash of the Union Baptists of Virginia and Brother Owen James of the Union Baptists of North Carolina were seated as visiting delegates. As pointed out in the previous chapter these men were active in planting churches and leading other established churches to join them in a movement to unite all Open-Communion Baptists into one body. A few of the Free Will Baptist churches that identified with the Alfred Moore faction in 1853 were later persuaded to join the Union Baptists. Bethel and Lousan Swamp in Lenoir County were among those churches that later united with them. In 1858 the Cape Fear Conference agreed to send Elders John Williams, Stephen D. Collins, and William Byrd as delegates to the Grand Council of Union Baptists of North Carolina. The following year B. W. Nash was again seated as a visiting delegate at the Cape Fear Conference and by resolution of the conference was granted permission to "preach in the bounds of the Cape Fear Conference for the present." Nash was also present at the 1874 session when he received permission to address the conference. He spoke for several minutes, "urging the necessity of union between all liberal

Baptists." (The term liberal was used to designate those Baptists who emphasized the concept of freedom implied in the terms "free will" and "free salvation.") In 1875 and 1876 Elder Nash was again a visiting delegate but there is no reference to his having spoken at these sessions. Finally, in 1884 he was enrolled as a visiting minister from the Union Association.

Other denominations which on occasion were represented by visitors to the Cape Fear Conference were the Disciples, the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, the Mt. Zion Baptist Association, and the Virginia and North Carolina Conference of the Christian Church.

In 1866 the Cape Fear Conference, meeting at Bethsaida Church, Harnett County, approved resolutions affecting "the colored members of our connection being allowed to preach the gospel" The full text of these resolutions is as follows:

Whereas, the political condition of the colored members of our connection has been changed, they having formerly been slaves, and deprived of the privilege of preaching the gospel but now declared free by the authority of the United States, and are no longer to be deprived of such a privilege; and whereas, some of them having applied to this conference for legal church authority; therefore be it resolved:

First, that if any colored member of our connection shall feel divinely called to take upon himself the public ministry, they shall have the liberty to apply to the church of which he is a member; and if the church, on examination, should find him worthy, may grant him license to exhort among his own color.

Second, that if the licentiate shall prove worthy, sound in faith and doctrine, and shall promise usefulness in the cause, then the pastor may, by the request of the church, proceed to a second examination; and if the candidate is found orthodox, may set him apart to preach the gospel, administer its ordinances, receive members, raise up

churches of their own color, to be held under the jurisdiction of this conference, and governed by the same discipline.

Third, that the conference appoint a committee of three ministers to visit said churches, whose duty it shall be to ascertain the statistics of said churches and report annually.

Fourth, that such churches shall be represented in the annual conference by the committee having the oversight of them, and enrolled on our minutes as the African Free Will Baptist Church.

The clear implications of these resolutions are: (1) that some colored members belonging to the churches of the Cape Fear Conference had felt divinely called to preach the gospel, (2) that since they were no longer slaves and could no longer be deprived of the privilege of preaching the gospel as before, the conference would now declare the procedure by which such a candidate may be licensed to "exhort among his own color" and if found worthy might then be ordained to the ministry so as to be able to "raise up churches of their own color," and (3) that such churches would be under the jurisdiction of the Cape Fear Conference and represented in the annual conference by a committee which was appointed to visit these churches, obtain statistics, and report annually to the conference. These resolutions would have the effect of creating separate churches for colored persons who would quite naturally be drawn out of the churches of their former masters to form churches of their own. The fact that these churches were to be designated in the minutes as the African Free Will Baptist Church would eventually lead to an entire separation of these churches from the Cape Fear Conference.

In the same year (1866) the Original Free Will Baptist General Conference for the first time acknowledged on the record the fact that there were people of color who were members of the churches. In their meeting at Pleasant Grove Church, Wayne County, Brother Jesse Smith moved that "the colored people who

are, or wish to be, members of our churches remain as they have done heretofore."² This motion would allow former slaves to continue their membership in the churches of their former masters, but few of them chose to do this. They preferred to belong to churches in which they could freely exercise their talents and interests without being dominated by their former masters or by white people. It must be remembered that as slaves they had not enjoyed the same rights and privileges of church membership as had the whites. Their names were usually kept on a separate roll as "colored members," nor could they serve as church officers or act in an official capacity. They were usually seated separately or in a balcony.

Leaders of the General Conference apparently soon recognized that many former slaves did not wish to remain as members of churches which were controlled by whites. Therefore, Elders Henry A. Dixon and R. K. Hearn offered a resolution at the 1867 session advising "the colored members of this connection to unite and form churches to themselves; but if any of them wish to remain enrolled among the white members, they can do so as private members, and we also advise them to form a general conference to themselves." They further resolved that a committee of ten ministers belonging to the conference be appointed to provide oversight and to advise and instruct these churches "until they become competent to act for themselves." The members of the committee were then named and requested to report to the conference at the next annual session concerning the progress and the condition of the said colored churches. Extant records of the conference which convened in 1868 fail to mention any report by the committee appointed the previous year, but evidently colored churches had been organized and were progressing in a satisfactory manner, for a committee of three ministers was appointed to organize the colored Free Will Baptist General Conference and instruct their churches during the next year.

Union With Other Groups Rejected

The General Conference of Original Free Will Baptists took a somewhat negative attitude toward any kind of merger with other churches during this period. A letter from the Chattahoochee United Free Will Baptist Association in Georgia was acknowledged at the annual session in 1857. The letter is said to have proposed a convention to be held for the purpose of uniting the Free Will Baptists of the South. Some of the ministers favored this proposal, including Elders William May, R. K. Hearn, Joseph S. Bell, and Joseph Sauls. Apparently others had serious reservations about approving such a union and did not hesitate to express their opinions. Elder Thomas Moore, Jr.'s motion to present this matter to the churches and obtain a report from them at the next annual session was approved by the conference. It was agreed that Elders R. K. Hearn and William May would continue to correspond with the United Free Will Baptists in Georgia. This correspondence had begun with the appointment of Elder R. K. Hearn as corresponding secretary by the conference when it convened at Core Creek Church, Craven County, in 1855. At the next session in 1858 the letter from the Chattahoochee Association was again read and the churches of the conference were asked to report their response to the proposal contained in it. The majority of the churches rejected the proposal as well as the correspondence with the Georgia brethren.

One can speculate as to why the majority of the churches decided as they did against this proposal. Perhaps some would have voted against any kind of union with another group unless they were in complete harmony with the views of North Carolina Free Will Baptists. Others would have regarded the logistics of getting scattered groups of Free Will Baptists together too difficult, this despite the fact that the Southern Baptist Convention had been organized in 1845 and the Methodist Episcopal Church, South had been formed the same year. Both of these organizations had come about as a result of the divisive issue of slavery. It is likely, however, that the Georgia brethren had shared their statement of

faith and practice in their correspondence and some North Carolina ministers raised certain objections to it. Since this association had earlier been known as United Baptists who were in the process of shedding their Calvinistic heritage, it seems clear that they had not divested themselves of certain of its tenets if they still subscribed to the statement of faith printed in the minutes of their 1850 session. In it they endorsed the doctrine of election and the doctrine of perseverance in a form that would not have satisfied many North Carolina Free Will Baptists.³ Furthermore, their position on the *complete* autonomy of the local church would not have met with universal approval in the General Conference.

Nevertheless, the General Conference did maintain close relations with the Cape Fear Conference and the door to better relations with other groups had not been completely closed. Thus at the meeting of the General Conference held at Hart's Meeting House in 1867 Elders George Joyner and Gideon Allen of the Disciples Conference and Elder Irvin Jones of the Union Baptists were seated as visiting brethren. Later in the program Elder Jones was given opportunity to state the purpose of his visit, which was to invite the General Conference to send delegates to a convention to be held at Hookerton Church, Greene County, for the purpose of trying to unite the three denominations: Union Baptists, Disciples, and Free Will Baptists. Ten men were appointed to represent Free Will Baptists at the proposed convention with Rufus K. Hearn's name heading the list. A decade earlier three of these men had favored the proposal of the Chattahoochee Association to unite the Free Will Baptists of the South and that proposal had been rejected.

The Hookerton Convention was held on December 27, 1867, with delegates representing the three groups present. Of the ten men chosen by the General Conference only Elder Rufus K. Hearn was there at the opening of the convention to represent Free Will Baptists. He was later joined by Elder Henry Dixon. A. J. Battle of the Disciples was elected as moderator. A committee of three, one from each denomination, was appointed to draft a preamble and resolutions for the consideration of the delegates. Dr. J. T.

Walsh of the Disciples, Elder B. W. Nash of the Union Baptists, and Elder R. K. Hearn of the Free Will Baptists served on this committee. After a brief absence the committee returned with its report which must have already been drafted by the Disciples, for it was lengthy and it contained items for which the Disciples had long contended. The first resolution declared: "That we will take the word of God for our sole rule of faith and practice." The fifth resolution stated: "That we regard all denominational names as unscriptural, and tending to divide the Lord's people; and that we will bear the name of Him, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, and like the disciples at Antioch, be called Christians."

Although some Union Baptist Churches subsequently united with the Disciples (Bethel in Lenoir County decided to join them in December, 1870), Free Will Baptists chose not to follow this course. In 1868 the General Conference was asked to vote on whether or not they were willing to make any concessions in their name in order to unite with the Union Baptists. This question was doubtless raised in view of the fact that two delegates from the Union Baptists had been seated at this conference. Later the conference had appointed four delegates to attend the next session of the Grand Council of Union Baptists in North Carolina. Elder William May, one of those four delegates, had then asked for the vote on the question of allowing any change in the denominational name in order to unite with the Union Baptists. The vote was against making any concessions in regard to this matter. Nevertheless, the delegates appointed to represent the General Conference at the Grand Council of Union Baptists in North Carolina must have attended that meeting. The following year (1869) Elder B. W. Nash of the Union Baptists was seated as a visiting minister at the General Conference. It is likely that he had brought a proposal that a convention of Free Communion Baptists of North Carolina be held. This would, of course, include Free Will Baptists, for their position on open communion to all Christians was well established. No details concerning date or place are mentioned in the record, but Elder R. K. Hearn's motion that the

moderator appoint three delegates to attend this convention was approved. The delegates chosen were Elders Haskill Jones, R. K. Hearn, and Brother Jesse Stancill. The moderator also appointed three delegates to attend the next meeting of the Grand Council of Union Baptists.

Finally, in 1870 delegates from the Disciples and from the Union Baptists were seated at the General Conference. There was evidently some discussion on or off the floor at this conference concerning possible union with other denominations. It seems likely that such discussion was prompted by the contacts with the Union Baptists and the Disciples, for both of these denominations had encouraged taking steps toward union of Baptist groups of a similar nature. But there were also some leading ministers among Free Will Baptists who had more than a casual interest in Christian unity. They appear to have recognized the witness of the New Testament to the universal church as the one body of Christ and the call for the churches to give expression to their unity in Christ. Elder Rufus K. Hearn was one of those who was involved in all of the proposals mentioned in the records of the General Conference since 1857 concerning some kind of working relationship with other churches. None of these proposals had met with success, perhaps because they had been initiated by other groups and because Free Will Baptists had more than once been weakened and divided by the strong influence of other groups which held points of view that were at odds with the traditional doctrines and practices of Free Will Baptists of the General Baptist heritage. For at least a generation this matter of union with other groups was closed in 1870 when the General Conference approved a motion by Elder James Moore that "we dismiss from our conference the subject of uniting with other denominations." Internal matters were occupying the attention of the ministers and delegates and there were signs that the conference was entering upon the greatest era of growth and increase in its entire history. Not until the end of the nineteenth century would Free Will Baptists in North Carolina give serious consideration to a union with other Free Will Baptists in the South and later still before they would

take steps toward a merger with Freewill Baptists in the Mid-West.

Ministerial Discipline

One of the major problems confronting the General Conference during this period was the matter of maintaining discipline in the ranks of the ministry. According to Harrison and Barfield, in 1856 "This conference commenced to practice what the discipline requires as to the examination of the character of the ministers."⁴ They report that all passed examination except R. A. Wetherington, who had been a member of the conference as early as 1845. He was accused of "keeping a grog shop," which was a place where intoxicating liquor was sold. A committee was appointed to inform him of the action of the conference and report his conduct at the next annual session. The next year Elder William May reported that he had "waited on" Elder Wetherington, who was present at this session of the conference and who "asked forgiveness and was restored." Then Elder R. K. Hearn offered a motion which was intended to discourage any such conduct as was exhibited by Elder Wetherington, stating "that we will not recognize any minister of the gospel who retails ardent spirits by small measure, that is, who sets up a shop for that purpose." Although this rule seemed to preclude the practice of selling alcoholic drinks, it did not forbid the use of strong drink in moderation. The temperance movement which had begun in New England earlier in the nineteenth century had discouraged the intemperate use of alcohol and only later began to emphasize total abstinence. Here in rural North Carolina it was common practice to make one's own brew and to indulge in its use at times. Wine making was an art with which some were familiar and many families had their own supply of homemade cider. For this reason ministers were among those who would "take a drink" now and then and sometimes failed to show proper restraint. Thus one of the most common charges against ministers mentioned in the conference minutes was that of "drinking to an excess." Such charges were usually made public at the time ministers were

examined as to their conduct when their names were called at the annual session of the conference. If there were charges against them, their names were recorded in the minutes along with the charges against them and a committee was appointed to look into the charges and report back to the conference at that session or the next.

One of the ministers whose name was dropped from the list of elders in 1862 was Elder Benjamin B. Albritton. Since he had been accused of "drinking to an excess", a committee of three was appointed to converse with him about this matter. Then in 1863 another committee was appointed "to wait on the church at Post Oak, Craven County, and inform them of the conduct of Elder Albritton." The church was requested to consider his case, to act in accordance with the Discipline and to report their action at the next General conference. Still another committee was appointed "to wait on Elder Albritton and inform him of the action of this conference, and state to him that he cannot become a member anymore until he gives satisfaction to the General Conference." Apparently, Elder Albritton had not cooperated with the first committee that had confronted him about this matter. However, the minutes of 1864 report that upon hearing the report of the committee which had been appointed to inform Post Oak Church of his conduct, Elder Albritton's name was restored to the list of ministers. But the minutes of the conference in 1867 report that upon his confession of "drinking to an excess" he was forgiven by vote of the body. Then in 1872 by vote of the conference his name was removed from the minutes as a minister of the gospel. No reason was given by the clerk for this action. In 1873 his name was again added to the list of ministers.

Elder Albritton had been a member of the General Conference as early as 1845. Then in 1853 he was one of the ministers who chose to identify himself with the Alfred Moore faction when the General Conference divided as a result of the Masonic controversy. In 1858, at Holly Hill Church, Duplin County, Elder Albritton and delegates from his church were again present at the annual session of the conference (James Moore faction) and by motion of

Elder R. K. Hearn they were invited to be seated. Then a committee of four was appointed to confer with Elder Albritton about again uniting with the conference. This committee reported as follows: "We, the committee, beg leave to report that Elder B. B. Albritton has given us full satisfaction by stating that he is willing to be ruled by our discipline and come under our rules and regulations; therefore, we move that he be received and his name enrolled on our minutes; also, the churches that he is pastor of, by an examination as they are called." The report was adopted.⁵

During his ministry Elder Albritton served on various committees appointed at the conference, was chosen as assistant moderator in 1860, and served at the request of the conference for one year as a "traveling preacher" for the sum of 200 dollars. It was Elder Albritton's motion at the 1859 session which proposed the holding of union meetings on the fifth Sundays in those months that have five Sundays. As a result of his motion a committee was chosen to draw up a plan for the union meetings. The plan initially called for three geographical districts with the union meetings being held in one of the districts each fifth weekend in succession, commencing on Saturday before each fifth Sunday. The next year (1860) Elder William T. Bilbro proposed that there be a union meeting in *each* of the districts as described in the plan presented at the 1859 session. But in 1861 it was apparent that the union meetings had not been successful. "After a warm discussion, Elder R. K. Hearn made a move to drop the union meeting work."⁶ Other denominations, including the Regular Baptists, had organized union meetings as early as the eighteenth century. Free Will Baptists would later resurrect the idea of union meetings as occasions for fellowship, preaching, and sharing information concerning denominational work.

The use and abuse of "ardent spirits" was not discontinued among Free Will Baptists during the nineteenth century. As examples of this we cite the following cases: The name of Elder C. C. King was removed from the list of ministers in 1870 for "drinking to an excess." In 1871 he was restored after giving satisfaction to the conference. Then in 1872 his name was again

"erased from the minutes" and a committee was appointed to "wait on C. C. King and demand his license and credentials." The reason for this action is not stated, but he may have decided to join the Disciples for he was preaching at Bethel Church, Lenoir County, on Saturday night before the second Sunday in July 1873 after that church had made the decision to leave the Union Baptists and unite with the Disciples in November, 1870.⁷ Some ministers who erred in the matter of "drinking to an excess" evidently preferred to make a public confession of their misdeeds rather than face a charge concerning the same. Such happened in the case of two men, Elders O. Harper and B. B. Albritton, in 1867. Both made confession of "drinking to an excess." Their confessions were received and by separate motions they were each forgiven. Then in 1871 Elder A. Lane voluntarily confessed to "drinking too much wine one time" and was forgiven by action of the conference. At that same session E. P. Sowers was expelled from the conference for "a violation of our discipline and immoral conduct" and J. B. Dean was expelled for "immoral conduct." Finally, in 1885 the General Conference meeting at Howell Swamp, Greene County, acknowledged that the crowds which were drawn to its annual sessions attracted also those persons who wished to offer for sale such items as cider and other intoxicating beverages. Therefore, two men, "J. J. Harrison and Fred McGlohon, were appointed to lay off certain boundaries around the church, and forbid the sale of cider or anything that is intoxicating within the bounds." It is evident that by this time the temperance movement was beginning to have an influence on the attitude of many Free Will Baptists. At least they were willing to impose restrictions on the sale of alcoholic drinks at the annual sessions of the General Conference. Three years later when the General Conference had divided into two conferences, the Eastern division was asked to "show by vote whether or not they endorsed the traffic of intoxicating liquors." The vote was against it.

As early as 1874 the Cape Fear Conference had a committee on temperance. At the annual session of the conference that year Elder J. W. Lucas gave the report of the Temperance Committee.

In his report he spoke on the necessity of total abstinence among members of the church. He was followed by Elder James Turnage who spoke on the same subject. There is some evidence that the Cape Fear Conference was being influenced by the Northern Freewill Baptists at this time, whose views on total abstinence were widely circulated through their denominational publications.

By 1886 large crowds assembled at the annual meetings of the General Conference each year, for it had become an important social event as well as a religious gathering. When the conference met at Black Jack Church, Pitt County, that year, *The Eastern Reflector*, published in Greenville, North Carolina, under the date of Wednesday, November 17, 1886, reported the following: "We attended the Free Will Baptist Conference at Black Jack, last Sunday. More people were in attendance than we ever saw gathered on a similar occasion. Various estimates were made as to the number present, reaching all the way from 2,500 to 5,000." Under the heading, "The Custom Should Cease," the writer added this comment:

We think the stands around big preachings for the sale of various articles is an objectionable feature, especially if they are allowed to conduct their business on Sunday. At Black Jack Sunday we noticed numerous stands where fruits, confections, oysters, barbecue, cigars, ginger pop, dry goods, and all such were being sold, and there was as much peddling and outcry for trade as is seen around fairs and like places.

It is doubtful, in fact, that this type of commercial activity would have been allowed within the town of Greenville at that date on Sundays. It was probably for this reason that the above comment was published by the *Reflector*, a newspaper owned and edited by D.J. Whichard.

The attendance at the General Conference had increased in part because of the number of churches and ministers affiliated with the conference but also because it had become an important

event in the lives of many people. With nothing other than accommodations in private homes in most places where the conference met, it must have been quite a problem to find enough places for the ministers and delegates to secure lodging during the three days while the conference was in session. Of course, the crowd that was in attendance at Black Jack Church likely included hundreds of people who had come from the local area just for that day since it was on a Sunday.

A Season of Growth

Because it was at the 1886 session of the General Conference that the decision was made to divide it into two conferences, it is appropriate to provide some description of the growth that occurred between 1853 and 1886. The reader will recall that it was in 1853 that the Masonic issue became so volatile that the conference divided and the future of the denomination must have seemed bleak. That year the James Moore faction could list only seventeen ministers and twenty-one churches when the conference adjourned. A few years later some of the churches that had identified with the Alfred Moore faction decided to return and unite with the James Moore group (the surviving conference). Each year the churches reported the number of persons baptized. In 1858 the churches reported a total of 246 baptized and in 1859 the number was 286. By 1860 there were reports from forty churches with 187 baptisms that year. During the Civil War years the number of baptisms declined as might be expected until 1864 when the churches reported an increase of more than 400 members during the year. In 1865 the number of additions reported was 275; in 1867 the churches reported 315 baptisms.

Meanwhile the number of ministers had begun to show a gradual increase in spite of the fact that occasional problems arose which required disciplinary action in the case of some ministers. Apparently during this period there was no official or standing council which examined and ordained ministers. Rather, two or more ministers were called upon to act in this capacity after the

local church of which the candidate was a member had licensed him as an exhorter and he had proved himself. But if there was a question concerning the character of a man who had been ordained, he might be judged unworthy to be added to the list of elders by the vote of the conference. In view of this a favorable vote of the conference was necessary for him to be added to the list. An unfavorable vote meant that he was not to be regarded as a Free Will Baptist minister. In 1869 the authority of "giving license and ordaining any person to the ministry" was withdrawn from two elders and the conference demanded the license and credentials of a man who had recently been ordained by the two elders. The conference further declared by motion that "we notify the public that _____ is no minister in our connection, and is unworthy of the confidence of any Christian people; therefore, we warn our churches to beware of him and have nothing to do with him."⁸

In 1868 there were four men whose names were added to the list of ministers and in 1873 the names of eight men were added to that list. Year by year the number of ministers increased until there were eighty-three ministers in 1885. Evidently one or more churches had called a man as pastor during the past year who was not enrolled on the list of ministers. Therefore, by motion the conference declared that "no church of the Free Will Baptist Conference shall call a minister to its care as pastor, unless he is a regular ordained minister of the Free Will Baptists and has his name enrolled on our minutes. Any church thus offending will be dealt with by this conference, by order of conference of 1885."⁹

Even more impressive than the increase in the ministry was the number of churches received into the conference between 1853 and 1886. In 1853 when the conference divided over the Masonic issue, there were only twenty-one churches that were listed in the minutes of the James Moore faction. (The minutes of the Alfred Moore faction for that year have not survived.) But by 1860 there were forty-two churches reporting to the conference. In the meantime the Cape Fear Conference was organized in 1855 with

eight churches. In 1864 the General Conference list of churches had reached a total of forty-seven. The number of churches located in Craven and Beaufort counties had shown a significant increase by this time; however, most of these churches were not represented at the conference that year, perhaps because of the conditions created by the Civil War. Some churches were so weakened by the devastating effects of the war that their very existence was threatened. For this reason Elders Joseph Sauls and R. K. Hearn were requested by the conference in 1866 to visit these churches as "traveling preachers" during the following year in an effort to build them up. At the conference in 1867 Hearn reported "that they had traveled the most of the year (apparently on weekends), had re-organized seven of the broken-down churches, and found other places where there was a great call for Freewill Baptist Preachers." The conference proceeded to appoint two other ministers, Elders Henry A. Dixon and B. B. Albritton, "to continue to travel and preach, and build up the broken-down churches."

In a closing word Elder R. K. Hearn, who served as clerk of the conference in 1869, made this comment in the minutes: "I rejoice when I look over the table (of statistics), to see the great ingathering in our churches the past year. In 1853 we numbered 1,230 members; in 1869 we number 3,898. To the Lord be all the praise, for he will bless us as long as we obey him, but if we forsake him he will forsake us." That same year the following churches were received into the conference: Sts. Delight, Greene County; Stoney Branch, Craven County; Spring Hill, Wayne County; Sandy Hill, Wilson County; Springs Creek, White Hill, and North Creek, Beaufort County; and Holly Spring, Johnston County.

In 1870 Elder Hearn presented a motion which very likely resulted in an increase in the number of new churches organized during the following years. His motion proposed that Section 2 of the church discipline which stated that "Every elder having the care of a church or churches, shall have the right to constitute branches of the same, be changed so as to give ordained ministers

in the connection a right to organize new churches wherever they can get a sufficient number of male members to fill the offices required by the church discipline."¹⁰ The purpose of his motion was to emphasize the organization of new churches rather than establishing branches of churches already in existence. This practice of establishing branches of churches had been followed in earlier times when the population was sparse and it was more difficult to gather a sufficient number of persons to constitute a church. Now that was no longer the case in eastern North Carolina. Furthermore, Hearn's motion provided that ordained ministers, whether or not they had the care of a church or churches, could organize new churches. This may have prompted a few men who had not received a call to serve as pastor of a church to become more active in church planting. In 1871 seven more churches were received into the conference. These were: Hull Road, Greene County; Juniper Chapel, Craven County; Stoney Hill, Wayne County; Little Rock and Jerusalem, Wilson County; Pine Level, Johnston County; and Russell Creek, Carteret County.

In 1872 the conference met at Free Union Church, Greene County. This church had been organized in 1843 and Elder James Moore was chosen as its first pastor. He had then served this church as pastor for almost thirty years and had been active in the ministry of the Free Will Baptist Church for forty-seven years. During that period the denomination had seen some fruitful years as well as troublesome times. Now there were seventy-three churches listed in the statistical table and a total membership of 4,624. Elder Moore's name appeared at the head of the list of ministers that year as in previous years since 1867, indicating his seniority among the elders in the conference. In 1867 he had given the "parting blessing" at the close of the conference and some wondered if this might be his last, but in 1872 he was still active in the ministry and was present at the conference that year. In recognition of his many years of service Elder R. K. Hearn offered a motion "giving to Elder James Moore the power to choose all the officers that are to preside over this conference."

Elder Moore then proceeded to appoint the officers and standing committees for that annual session. In 1878 at Grimsley Church, Greene County, where he had first united with the church many years before, he preached the introductory sermon and was chosen to serve as moderator that year. Almost four years later he died at the age of eighty-nine.

In 1873 four churches were received into the conference: Saratoga, Wilson County; Bethany, Pamlico County; Howell Swamp, Greene County; and Oak Grove, Bladen County. During the following year and perhaps over a longer period prior to the meeting of the conference in 1874 there was a flurry of activity in church planting, for there were ten churches received into the conference, which met that year at Hull Road Church, Greene County. The next year when the conference convened at Goose Creek Church, Pamlico County, three additional churches were admitted to the conference. In 1876 at Elm Grove Church, Pitt County, a total of eight churches were received; two were received in 1877 and four in 1878, three of which were located in Tyrrell, Washington, and Hertford counties, an area where Free Will Baptists had not been actively involved for almost a century. However, that same year (1878) one church in Greene County and three churches in Brunswick County were dismissed without explanation. Three churches were added in 1879 and six churches were received in 1880. One or more churches were added to the conference each year between 1881 and 1885.

It is not surprising that some of these churches which were organized in this period did not survive. The minutes report that the names of certain churches were discontinued by action of the conference. Various reasons could be given for the fact that some churches did not prosper enough to survive. Just as new Christians need to be nurtured in the faith, so new churches must be strengthened and built up in the faith if they are to fulfill their purpose. Although other circumstances were involved, it is likely that the leadership in some of these churches was inadequate to provide the necessary stimulus for development and spiritual growth. In some cases there may have been more interest in

seeing a group of people become a church organization than in the more difficult task of growing a church.

Nevertheless, there were signs of vitality and evidence of growth in the denomination, which had spread over a wide area of North Carolina extending eastward as far as Tyrell County and as far west as Wake and Chatham counties. When the conference met at Black Jack Church, Pitt County, in 1886 there were 118 churches listed as members of the General Conference and a total membership of 8,358. Because the number of churches had increased substantially during the past three decades and were dispersed over such a wide area, it was felt that a division of the conference was necessary. Considering the means of transportation available at that time, the distance in travel was simply too great for effective participation in the annual conference. Moreover, the crowds attending were becoming too large to be entertained by the host church. A committee of six ministers was chosen to make the dividing line. They reported (1) that the Wilmington and Weldon Railroad was to be the dividing line, (2) that any church might choose to belong to either of the two conferences, and (3) that no changes were to be made in the discipline without a three-fourths vote in both conferences. The two conferences were designated as the Eastern and Western Conferences. Of these the Eastern was much larger, so that in 1887 when they convened separately the Eastern Conference could claim 104 churches with a total membership of 7,252 and seventy-three ministers while the Western Conference listed only twenty-six churches with a total membership of 1,403 and nineteen ministers.

Both conferences continued to grow with the addition of new churches each year until in 1895 the Eastern Conference listed 120 churches in the minutes for that year and a total of 9,016 members while the Western Conference had increased to forty-seven churches and 2,551 members. That year the ministers and delegates of the Eastern Conference assembled at Gum Swamp Church, Pitt County. Again the matter of dividing this conference was presented in the form of a motion which proposed that in the

division "the first is to be known as the Central Original Conference and the second is to be called the Eastern Conference."¹¹ The boundaries of the two conferences were determined largely by designating areas covered by certain counties in Eastern North Carolina with portions of Wayne, Lenoir, and Wilson counties being divided. It was agreed that the two conferences would use the same hymnbook, the same church paper, and be governed by the same discipline.

Meanwhile, the Cape Fear Conference had continued to show a steady increase in the number of churches and in total membership. In 1896 they could claim as many as twenty-nine churches and a total membership of 2,159 with twenty-two ministers. Year by year they maintained a fraternal relationship with the General Conference. After the division of that conference in 1886 they sent delegates to the Western and Eastern Conferences and in turn seated delegates from these conferences in their annual meetings. In 1890 the Cape Fear Conference met at Hopewell Church, Johnston County. There were four visiting brethren from the Western Conference, one of which was Elder P.T. Lucas who presented the *Free Will Baptist*, then published at Snow Hill, North Carolina, and asked for the patronage of this conference. The Cape Fear Conference then endorsed the *Free Will Baptist*, as "the organ of the denomination."

That same year at the Western Conference which met at Little Rock Church, Wilson County, Elder R. A. Johnson and Brother H. W. Jernigan were seated as delegates from the Cape Fear Conference. A committee was appointed to confer with these men from the Cape Fear Conference and to draw up resolutions favoring the union of the two conferences or a working relationship between them. This committee prepared a list of resolutions which were then reported to the conference. These resolutions proposed that a general conference be held on Tuesday before the second Sunday in February 1891 at Pine Level Church, Johnston County, with the officers and ministers of each conference as members of that body and one delegate from each church belonging to either conference. This effort to bring about greater unity

between the Western and the Cape Fear Conferences was the first step toward uniting Free Will Baptists in a single organization throughout North Carolina. The Union Conference held its first meeting as scheduled at Pine Level. Annual meetings were held in February each year thereafter until the organization of the North Carolina State Convention was proposed in 1912.

The Free Will Baptist

From their beginning North Carolina Free Will Baptists had operated without a church paper until action was taken at the annual meeting of the General Conference in 1873 to "authorize Brother E. R. Ellis to draw on the conference treasurer for a sufficient amount to pay for printing a prospectus for a newspaper." This motion was made by Elder R. K. Hearn, who had been elected to serve as clerk of the conference several times since he had been received into the conference. Others, including Elders Daniel Davis and Haskill Jones, supported the idea of a church paper, an idea whose time had come. Soon thereafter copies of a prospectus were printed and distributed and, as editor, Robert Ellis began to publish the paper at Fremont, North Carolina. He issued it weekly as the *Free Will Baptist Advocate*. This undertaking would require the full support of the conference and its member churches if it were to succeed. For this reason a committee was appointed at the 1874 session "to take some action in regard to the better support of the *Free Will Baptist Advocate*, and report on Saturday morning." The following day Elder Ray Phillips offered the committee's recommendation: "That we loan to Brother Ellis, editor of the *Free Will Baptist Advocate*, all the surplus funds in the treasury, and request every church belonging to this conference to raise all the funds they can and forward to the editor, for papers to be sent to their respective churches, at the rate of one copy (subscription) per year, for every \$2,00 sent."¹² A two dollar per year subscription may have been more than many were able or willing to pay; however, the committee's report was adopted unanimously.

That same year Robert Ellis attended the Cape Fear Conference which met at Johnson Union Church, Johnston County, and was seated as a visiting delegate and recognized as editor of the *Free Will Baptist Advocate*. Although the minutes do not reveal as much, he likely appealed to the ministers and delegates to support the church paper. As indicated above, in 1890 the Cape Fear Conference voted to endorse the *Free Will Baptist* as the organ of the denomination.

Using the format of a newspaper the *Free Will Baptist Advocate* was published at Fremont for about a year after which it was moved to Toisnot, now known as Elm City, North Carolina. The fact that the editor changed its name to *Toisnot Transcript* caused some dissatisfaction and the number of subscribers declined to the point that the publication had to be suspended about 1877. Recognizing the continuing need for a church paper, the leaders of the General Conference proposed to start it up again. Elders Rufus Holland and Levi Johnson of Wayne County were elected as editor and manager. Fremont was again chosen as the place of publication and the original name of the paper was restored. For reasons that are not clear it did not gain enough support to continue and publication was again suspended in 1879.

When the General Conference convened at Piney Grove Church, Pitt County, in 1880 the subject of the church paper was brought to the floor. Elder R. K. Hearn was requested to submit "a plan by which he thinks we can successfully publish a Free Will Baptist newspaper." Elder Hearn had apparently given some thought to this matter. He then proposed that the conference should obtain full ownership of the printing press, hire someone to take charge of it, and publish the paper at the expense of the conference. Subscriptions should be solicited at this session of the conference and afterwards by all who have an interest in the paper. If sufficient funds are not made available through subscriptions, then the churches would be asked to contribute a sufficient amount to pay all expenses and to pay for the press.

R. K. Hearn was then employed as editor at a salary of \$400 per annum for his services. He began publishing the paper again

at Fremont, and dropped the word "advocate" from its name. The next year he moved to New Bern and published it there. Each year Elder Hearn reported to the conference the amount of receipts and expenses and each year there was a deficit. The conference was asked to contribute toward the expenses, but there was never enough to balance the account. Finally, in 1886 a committee was appointed to make recommendations regarding the church paper. They reported as follows: "That the old system of running the paper be abolished, and that we loan the press to Elder R. K. Hearn on trust for the ensuing year, or as many years as the conference may see proper, or hereafter prescribe, provided that he, Elder Hearn, run the paper as a Free Will Baptist organ at his own expense." Elder Hearn continued to publish it on these terms until February 1889 at which time he decided to give up the work on account of poor health. In that year a stock company was formed and the conference agreed to give their interest in the press to the Free Will Baptist Publishing Company. It was moved to Snow Hill, North Carolina, where Elder W. L. Bilbro served as editor for one year. After he resigned, Elder J. M. Barfield was chosen as editor. He then moved the equipment to Ormondsville in Greene County and published the paper there until 1894 when a lot was purchased in Ayden and a small building was erected on it to house the publishing company. After this building was destroyed by fire in 1902, another lot was purchased in Ayden and a building was erected on it for the operation of this publishing enterprise.

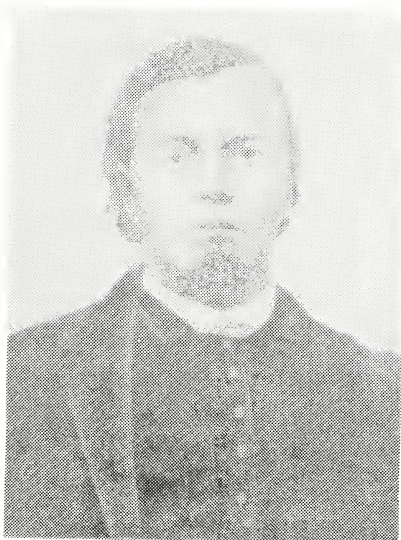
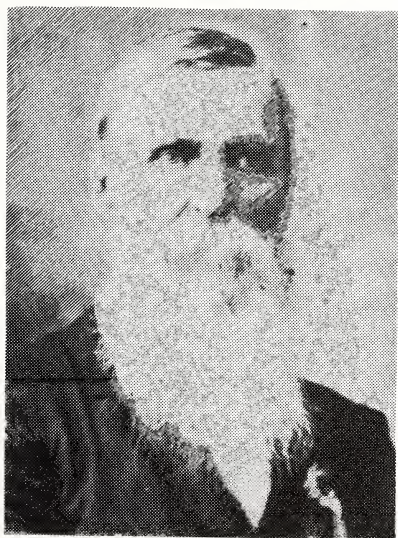
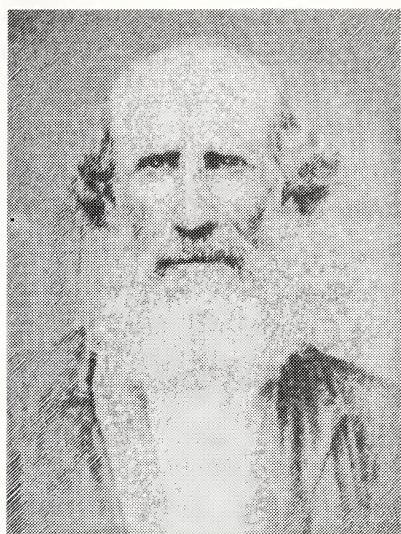
Elder E. T. Phillips was employed by Elder Barfield as his assistant in 1898 and the following year Elder Phillips was made secretary of the stock company. The success of the *Free Will Baptist* during the next several years was due largely to the vision and untiring efforts of these two men. Still another misfortune occurred in 1913 when the building which housed the press was again damaged by fire. Several hundred dollars in stock was raised to refurnish the office and the paper continued to be published. For several years E. T. Phillips assumed the editorship of the publishing company and took care of the business operation

as well. In 1906 he began writing Sunday school literature, including the Senior and Junior quarterlies and later added the Primary quarterly. He continued to write the Sunday school literature for Free Will Baptists for thirty years. However, some literature for use in Sunday schools was written and published prior to 1906. As early as 1893 the Cape Fear Conference voted to "adopt the Free Will Baptist Sabbath school literature." This conference, as well as the Union Conference, gave some attention to the promotion of Sunday schools in the denomination.

In the fall of 1916 Mr. C. K. Dunn, Sr., was employed as editor of the *Free Will Baptist*. At that time Mr. E. E. Dail was serving as business manager of the stock company, but soon thereafter his duties were transferred to Mr. Dunn, who for five years had the responsibility of both positions. Because the work was too demanding for one person, in 1921 Elder E. T. Phillips was made editor of the paper in addition to his work as writer of literature. He held this position until his retirement in 1935. His years of service to the Free Will Baptist Publishing Company and to the denomination at large was outstanding in every respect.¹³

Rev. & Mrs. W. H. Laughinghouse; First Building, FWB
Childrens's Home





Top: Rufus K. Hearn; J. M. Barfield
Bottom: Henry Cunningham; Daniel Davis

Chapter X

Progress in the Early Twentieth Century

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, Original Free Will Baptists of North Carolina were in a prosperous condition in terms of growth in membership and increase in the number of churches, but they were divided into several conferences with no organization that embraced all of these conferences in order to give expression to their unity as a denomination. The Cape Fear Conference had been organized in 1855 with eight churches. Following the disruptions caused by the Disciples controversy in the 1840's and the Masonic issue in the 1850's, the General Conference began to enjoy a period of growth such as it had not known in its history. By 1886 the number of churches had increased to 118 and these were dispersed throughout the eastern part of the state, which in those days must have made it difficult for ministers and delegates to attend the annual conference. In that year the General Conference decided to divide into two conferences to be known as the Eastern and the Western conferences. Then in 1891 the Cape Fear and the Western conferences organized the Union Conference in order to express their unity through an annual meeting to be held in addition to the meetings of the respective conferences each year. The first such meeting was held on February 3 and 4, 1891, at Pine Level Church in Johnston County. The two conferences which formed the Union Conference were in close proximity and shared common interests.

Then, because of continuing growth and the need to consolidate the gains made, the Eastern division of the original General Conference agreed to a further division into what is now the Central and Eastern Conferences. After the first annual session of each of these two conferences they were represented by delegates at the annual meeting of the Union Conference. Thus, there were two opposite forces at work among North Carolina Free Will Baptists: the need to divide into smaller conference units because of the increase in the number of churches spread out over a wide

area and the need for an inclusive organization to embrace all the conferences and give direction and unity to the denomination as a whole.

From 1891 until 1912 the Union Conference provided a symbolic unity for North Carolina Free Will Baptists. But for several years there was only token representation of the churches other than those belonging to the Cape Fear and Western conferences. At the turn of the century when the Union Conference began to involve more churches in the Central and Eastern conferences, there was still little manifest interest in the work of the Union Conference and for several years many churches were represented only by letter or by the pastor. A Ministers' Meeting, organized in 1895, met each year prior to the convening of the Union Conference. Still, this did not seem to stimulate broader interest and involvement in the conference. Attempts were made at the annual sessions to encourage support for such causes as prohibition of the production and sale of alcoholic beverages, the organization of Sabbath (Sunday) schools, support for the new Seminary located at Ayden (opened in 1898), and the promotion of missions. The most probable reason for the lack of enthusiastic participation on the part of the churches in the annual meetings of the Union Conference is that it duplicated much of what was being done in the regular meetings of the various conferences. The fact that there was very little accomplished as a result of the actions taken in the annual meetings did nothing to encourage more participation in the Union Conference. Its greatest value was the inspiration and fellowship it provided and the sharing of ideas among some of the leaders in its constituent conferences who regularly attended its annual sessions. Clearly something more was needed to give expression to the unity of Original Free Will Baptists and to channel their energies and their stewardship in mission and service to the world.

Meanwhile, the vision of a larger fellowship of Free Will Baptists extending beyond North Carolina had been gaining attention. One important medium which must have nurtured this vision was the growing circulation of the *Free Will Baptist*, which

was beginning to reach into the homes of people in other states where Free Will Baptists now lived. For decades there had been an interest in Free Will Baptist families who had moved to other states from North Carolina. Some of them wrote back to their relatives and friends and described the new life which they had found in states like Tennessee, Alabama, Georgia, Arkansas, and as far west as Texas. Only scattered copies of such letters written by these pioneer Free Will Baptists remain today, but they are testimony to the fact that migration was the chief means by which the faith and message of this denomination was first carried to other states in the South.

As we have seen, there were very few official contacts with other Free Will Baptist groups in other states except in South Carolina. One of these was the brief correspondence with the Chattahoochee United Free Will Baptist Association in Georgia in 1857-58. This association had proposed a union of the Free Will Baptists of the South, but the idea was rejected by the churches of the General Conference in North Carolina, following a spirited discussion of the subject during the 1857 session, which must have left many of the brethren in doubt as to the merits of such a union. The fact that the Chattahoochee Association had its beginning among a group of Regular Baptist churches which had given up much of their Calvinist heritage but still held some views that differed slightly from those embraced by the churches of the General Conference may have been the deciding factor when the final vote was taken in 1858.

But by the end of the nineteenth century, subscribers to the *Free Will Baptist* paper were to be found in many states. The pages of the *Baptist* carried news items as well as letters and inspirational articles from different parts of the country. Even the Ohio River Yearly Meeting of Freewill Baptists, which had been affiliated with the Northern Freewill Baptists, had adopted the *Baptist* as its organ several years before 1900, according to a letter which the clerk sent to the Central Conference meeting that year.

Another catalyst in the development of denominational identity and loyalty was the publication in 1897 of a *History of the Free*

Will Baptists of North Carolina by Elders Thad F. Harrison and J. M. Barfield. This volume served a genuine need among Free Will Baptists in North Carolina and beyond for several decades. Although it was not the work of trained historians, it provided its readers with a grasp of their denominational origins in North Carolina, a survey of distinctive doctrines, and an account of their organizational history based on annual conference minutes. Despite its shortcomings it was to serve as an effective tool in informing Free Will Baptists concerning their heritage. It also reminded them that although they lacked some of the advantages enjoyed by larger denominations, they were not a new movement but one whose roots went back to the colonial period and earlier. In spite of their conflicts and struggles to survive they had finally achieved a level of public acceptance that enabled them to experience significant growth. At a time when strict Calvinism was being widely questioned or quietly ignored throughout the nation, this little volume underscored the merits of and arguments for the Arminian Baptist tradition.

Another factor in the quest for unity and identity in the denomination was the development of the Ayden Seminary, especially its theological department for the preparation of ministers. Soon after the opening of the Seminary in 1898 the trustees were able to obtain the services of Professor Thomas E. Peden, A.M., as principal of the school. Professor Peden recognized that an important need of the denomination was a curriculum in theology since there had never been a program sponsored by North Carolina Free Will Baptists for the education of ministers. He therefore initiated such a curriculum and devoted much of his time as instructor in this department. Others shared with him the desire for a better trained ministry and soon there were urgent appeals in the various conferences for the support of the Seminary and for men called into the ministry to make use of the opportunities for further learning at this institution. During the early decades of the twentieth century dozens of ministers received their training at the Seminary, some of them from states other than North Carolina.¹

This effort to encourage attendance at the Seminary and to offer its services to Free Will Baptists in other states parallels another development aimed at bringing greater unity to the denomination. This was the creation of a new organization to be known as the Free Will Baptist General Conference, which would embrace conferences and associations throughout the Southeast, together with some representation by Northern Freewill Baptists. A leading figure in the formation of this organization was Thomas E. Peden, who had come to Ayden in 1898 to serve as principal of the Seminary while continuing his role as a leading minister in the Ohio River Yearly Meeting, serving as clerk in 1900 and in the following years.

There is some evidence that the General Conference was first convened in 1896. In fact, the *Free Will Baptist* in the issue for May 27, 1896, announced that such a meeting was scheduled to be held in Nashville, Tennessee, that year. The announcement stated that the General Conference would convene on October 7, 1896, with the Cumberland Association as host of the meeting. It was signed by Thomas E. Peden, Clerk.

The next meeting of this General Conference was held at Ayden, North Carolina, on October 5-8, 1898. It was designated as the thirtieth session of the Triennial Free Will Baptist General Conference and the statistical table listed a large number of yearly meetings, associations, and conferences, most of which were affiliated with the (Northern) General Conference of Freewill Baptists. The delegates present were mainly persons from the conferences in eastern North Carolina. The next session of the conference was held in 1901 at Cofer's Chapel Church in Nashville, Tennessee. The minutes designate this as the thirty-first session and the statistical table lists more than seventy-five associations or conferences with a total membership of 93,487, most of which were affiliated with the Northern Freewill Baptists. The fact that the General Conference of Freewill Baptists (Northern) held its thirty-first triennial session in September, 1901, at Harpers Ferry, West Virginia, makes it apparent that Elder Peden, who was the clerk of this new General Conference in the South,

did not agree with the direction being taken by the leadership of the Northern General Conference and wished to unite all Free Will Baptists throughout the nation in a body that would maintain denominational identity. Officials of the Northern General Conference were already engaged in discussions with other denominations about a possible merger. Talks were first initiated with the Disciples of Christ, but when these talks did not appear to be fruitful, similar efforts were made to bring about a merger with representatives of the Northern Baptists. There was a growing awareness among leaders of these two denominations that the theological and practical differences which kept them apart were minor. The issues which had led to the origin of the Freewill Baptists in New England were no longer a barrier to close ties with other Baptists largely because the earlier Calvinism of New England Baptists had been eroded by the changing climate of theological opinion in America.

Free Will Baptists in the South had long been aware of the Northern Freewill Baptists. Communication between the two groups had begun as early as 1827 when Elder Jesse Heath first wrote to the editor of the *Morning Star*, giving basic information about the North Carolina movement and expressing a desire for unity. The visits of Elias Hutchins to North and South Carolina in 1829-32 encouraged further communication between these two groups, but in the later 1830's the issue of slavery began to heat up among Northern Freewill Baptists, who, in turn, took a firm stand against slave-holding and, like some other Christian bodies, began to regard anyone who would tolerate the continuation of slavery as unchristian. Even though there is apparently no evidence of a pro-slavery argument among North Carolina Free Will Baptists during that period, some of them did own slaves. Nor is there any evidence of an anti-slavery position taken by Free Will Baptists in this state. In any case the Northern General Conference decided in 1839 to break all ties with their brethren in North Carolina. They ceased to include the two North Carolina conferences—Bethel and Shiloh—in their statistical table for the tenth General Conference in 1839 with this note: "It will be seen

by the minutes that by a vote of the General Conference the conferences in North Carolina are not inserted in our statistical table, as they have never formally united with us, and have made no returns to the Conference for several years."²

At the beginning of the twentieth century the slavery issue was a thing of the past, but there were sectional differences between Northerners and Southerners and there was still bitterness over the Civil War and its aftermath. These factors, together with the determination of the great majority of the Northern Freewill Baptists to proceed with their plans for merger with Northern Baptists, doomed from the start the dream of uniting all Free Will Baptists throughout the nation. That dream was nurtured by only a handful at the time and the obstacles for achieving it were formidable. Even the more realistic hope of uniting Free Will Baptists in the South would not be easy. Travel, except by rail, was still very slow and difficult. Automobiles were just beginning to appear and few could afford to own one. Most rural Southerners were struggling with the problems of poverty, ignorance, and isolation. Free Will Baptists were no exception in this regard. They enjoyed very limited cultural advantages and not many traveled outside their local area. The possibility of creating a real brotherhood across several southern states was a tremendous challenge. Other denominations had achieved this, but they had greater numbers and resources with which to bring it about. Furthermore, such denominations as the Baptists, Methodists and Presbyterians had experienced a degree of regional unity before the issues which led to the Civil War had torn the Southerners apart from their Northern counterparts. Since the formation of these distinctly southern denominations, they had developed their own identities and had built denominational institutions and programs well before the end of the nineteenth century.

One of the greatest hindrances to such development among Free Will Baptists in the South was the lack of an educated leadership, coupled with a limited vision as to what could be accomplished. The fact that at the turn of the twentieth century there was only one educational institution sponsored by this

denomination, one denominational paper, one organized state convention (Georgia), and no regional organization to effectively unite Free Will Baptists in the South, many of whom shared a common origin, is indicative of the slow progress toward the development of a strong regional denomination. For too long these people, especially those living outside of eastern North Carolina, had been isolated from each other and had struggled along with a minimum of organization, devoted but short-sighted leadership, and limited resources to build a denomination. The marvel is that they managed to retain their identity and continued to experience a measurable growth in spite of these deficiencies. Now at last some progress was being made to develop institutions and organized programs to accomplish the mission of the Church, but progress in the early stages of this development was painfully slow.

The General Conference in the South held its next triennial session (designated the thirty-second session) in October 1904 at Dunn, North Carolina. Fourteen conferences, associations, and yearly meetings from six states (North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Ohio, and North Dakota) sent reports to this meeting of the General Conference. This is a small fraction of the total number of church bodies that might have been represented and only five more than the number reported at the previous session. Committees on education, home missions, foreign missions, temperance, the ministry, state of the denomination, and Sabbath schools were appointed and each of these presented a report during the seven-day meeting. As was usual at such gatherings, there was much preaching and conversation on topics of current interest. In his closing remarks the clerk (Elder Peden) wrote: "Many brethren only remained two or three days, others did not come until the conference was half through; this distracted some from the interest. It is hoped next time all will be on hand the first day with their minds made up to spend at least ten days in advancing God's cause and kingdom by giving due heed to the various subjects that call for careful attention." One may question whether a meeting of such duration was a realistic expectation of

people with such limited resources and time for meetings of this kind.

There is a characteristic optimism expressed throughout the minutes of this session. Perhaps this is due in part to the fact that Elder Peden was the clerk (recording secretary) and was also a member of several committees which submitted written reports at the conference. This noble gentleman, now advanced in age, seems to have played an important role in trying to give direction and set the tone of these sessions of the General Conference. Because of his background and experience among Northern Freewill Baptists as well as a liberal education and a magnanimous spirit, he was probably the best qualified person to serve as a leader of the General Conference. A native of Ohio, he was a graduate of Albany Manual Labor University, a type of institution which emphasized labor as an essential part of the total educational experience. He had been serving in the ministry more than fifty years when he died in 1913 at the age of eighty.

We have no information concerning the next triennial session, assuming that it was convened in 1907. The Conference did convene in 1910 at Florence, Alabama, and was scheduled to hold its next session in the area of the Midway Association in Georgia. However, there is no record of its convening there and interest in continuing the organization seems to have waned after the session in 1910. The following year, without stating any grounds for its actions, the Central Conference in North Carolina voted to withdraw from the Triennial Conference. For whatever reason the General Conference seems to have expired, for it had to be revived at a later date following other developments affecting the future course of Free Will Baptist history.

One of these developments was the final agreement reached following negotiations between Baptists and Freewill Baptists in the North. Although the groundwork for such negotiations was laid as early as the twenty-sixth General Conference held in Marion, Ohio, in 1886, actions taken at the General Conference which met at Hillsdale, Michigan, in 1904 led to the merger that was consummated in 1911, following the approval of "The Basis

of Union", a document consisting of seven articles, by both the Baptists and the Freewill Baptists in their constituent bodies. Final action was taken by the thirty-fourth General Conference in 1910 when the Conference approved "The Basis of Union" and authorized the Conference Board to transfer and deliver its assets, both personal and real, to the appropriate Baptist agencies.³ The two denominations merged all their resources and though the Northern General Conference of Freewill Baptists continued to meet in triennial sessions as late as 1917 and though many Freewill Baptists continued to send in their benevolent contributions through their own historic channels, a union of Freewill Baptists with the Northern Baptist Convention was gradually accomplished at all levels.

Opposition to this union was strongest in the Mid-West, in Nebraska, Missouri, and Indiana. Rev. John H. Wolfe of Nebraska was the most vocal leader of the opposition. He, along with other leading ministers in that area, would later convene representatives of associations and yearly meetings to organize the Co-operative General Association of Freewill Baptists.

Organization of the North Carolina Convention

Meanwhile another important development was taking place in North Carolina. By 1912 there was a growing recognition that a more effective organization to unite Free Will Baptists in this state was needed. The Union Conference had not achieved the level of participation in its annual meetings that its leaders were striving for. Some felt that a new organization might provide the spark that was needed to involve more churches as well as conferences and associations that had not heretofore sent delegates to the annual meetings. A greater degree of cooperation was also urgently needed to provide support for such programs as the Ayden Seminary. Pledges were being sought in the Central Conference as early as 1910 to help meet operating costs and to raise funds for new dormitory construction. Appeals were also being made in other conferences for support of the Seminary and

the recruitment of students. At the same time there was a growing interest in missions, both home and foreign. The various conferences were beginning to focus on the need for church extension or what is today called church planting and there was an occasional sermon preached or a published statement which called attention to Christ's command to make disciples among all nations. The care of orphans and the aged likewise received notice and some proposals were being made that a home for the aged and orphans should be established. Such programs could not be carried out unless there was a more effective organization in place which could win the confidence of the churches and the conferences and coordinate their efforts toward service for Christ in the world.

It was during the twentieth annual session of the Union Conference held at Micro Church in 1912 that Dr. E. L. St Claire presented a resolution asking that the name of this body be changed to the North Carolina State Convention of the Original Free Will Baptists, that a new constitution and by-laws be drafted, that efforts be made to get all the Free Will Baptists in the western part of the state to represent in the Convention, and that each church may be represented in the Convention. Dr. St Claire had become well known and admired through his writings which appeared regularly in the *Baptist*. The fact that he was a native of Georgia, where a state convention had been organized as early as 1885, may be one reason why he was the one who offered the proposal to organize a state convention in North Carolina.

At this last session of the Union Conference it was agreed that certain officers should be elected to guide the new organization and plan for the first annual meeting. The following were elected: D. B. Sasser, president; M. C. Prescott, vice-president; E. T. Phillips, secretary; C.M. Johnson, corresponding secretary; A. T. Dawson, treasurer. Three additional persons were elected to the Executive Committee and a State Mission Board, consisting of representatives from the Cape Fear, Central, Eastern, and Western conferences, was chosen. A committee on Constitution and By-Laws was elected and charged to report at the first annual meeting of the Convention.

On September 17, 1913, the first annual session of the North Carolina State Convention met with the church at Bailey, North Carolina. The adoption of a constitution and by-laws was the first order of business. Sixty-four churches, some by letter, reported to this session and there were twenty ministers present, most of them from the Western Conference. Only one minister from the Eastern and one from the Cape Fear was enrolled at this session. Among the more important items of business was the adoption of an earlier proposal in the Western Conference for the establishment of a Free Will Baptist Orphanage. A resolution was adopted to amend the charter of the Free Will Baptist Publishing Company, allowing the sale of capital stock up to \$10,000, the value of each share to be \$10.00. Solicitations for the sale of these shares were to be made to conferences, union meetings, etc. as well as to individuals. It was also provided that as soon as \$3,000 had been raised, a meeting of stockholders was to be held to elect a Board of Directors who would choose all necessary officers. There were enthusiastic statements made on education, particularly in support of Ayden Seminary, and a resolution was adopted calling on all the churches to make generous donations to their respective conferences for the benefit of the Seminary and that a committee of three be appointed in each church to help reach a goal of \$8,000 for this cause.

The Impact of the Holiness and Pentecostal Movements

The North Carolina State Convention had now been launched and in the coming years would involve a much wider representation of Free Will Baptists throughout the state. Some of the major concerns of its constituency had been addressed in this first session, but there was much work to be done if the goals of its founders were to be achieved. There were also serious problems to be confronted, including the doctrinal issues which had divided the Cape Fear Conference in its annual session in 1911 and was beginning to have an impact on a few of the churches in other conferences. This problem may have contributed to the fact that

the Cape Fear Conference was represented by only one minister and one church at the first session of the State Convention though other factors were likely involved also. The problem centered around the interpretation of the doctrine of Sanctification, especially the question as to whether it should be understood as a continuing or progressive experience in the life of a believer or as an instantaneous experience subsequent to regeneration. This issue had been raised as a result of the influence of the Holiness Movement in eastern North Carolina, especially in the area of Harnett, Sampson, and adjoining counties. The Holiness Movement had indeed made inroads into several denominations in America, especially the Methodist Episcopal Church, both North and South, and this had resulted in the formation of new denominations such as the Nazarene Church and various holiness churches. These developments occurred during the last decades of the nineteenth century and, as with the impact of other movements in American church history, Free Will Baptists were not immune to these influences. The result was a division in the Cape Fear Conference and turmoil in the churches of that area as well as in parts of the Western, Central, and Eastern conferences of the Free Will Baptist Church.

As early as the 1880's the Cape Fear Conference had decided to adopt a different form of the Articles of Faith from that which they had previously recognized. Instead of the former Articles of Faith which the Original Free Will Baptists of North Carolina had adopted in 1812, the Cape Fear Conference adopted the Articles of Faith subscribed to by the (Northern) General Conference of Freewill Baptists. This action was taken prior to 1883 in which year the oldest extant copy of the new Discipline appeared in print. Article 12 on "Justification and Sanctification" appears exactly as it reads in the Northern Freewill Baptist statement of faith. The two doctrines are stated separately but under the same heading. The statement on Sanctification declares that this work of God's grace "... commences at regeneration, and the Christian can and should abide in this state to the end of life, constantly growing in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ."⁴

But in 1899 a revised edition of the Discipline of the Cape Fear Conference appeared in which a major change is evident in the statement on Sanctification. In this edition "Sanctification" appears as a separate article (Article 13). The statement introduces a distinction between the human and the divine role in sanctification and employs the word "instantaneous" to describe this work of divine grace, which "renders the believer's heart free from all sin," is obtained by faith, and is "subsequent to regeneration." The "holiness" version of the doctrine of Sanctification had thus become a part of the Articles of Faith recognized by the Cape Fear Conference.⁵ It is apparent that sooner or later some persons belonging to churches which were members of this conference became aware of the significance of this change in the statement on Sanctification and began to raise objection to its inclusion in the Discipline. This inevitably led to dissension in the churches and among ministers of the conference. By 1911 the issue had become so controversial that officials of the conference decided to use the current statement of faith in the Discipline as a test of fellowship for the seating of delegates and ministers at the 1911 session of the conference, which was held at Long Branch Church, near Dunn, North Carolina. As a result a minority of the ministers and delegates representing their churches at this session were not seated. They therefore decided to withdraw and on January 12, 1912, they convened a meeting at Shady Grove Church, Sampson County, with the purpose of organizing themselves as the true Cape Fear Conference of Original Free Will Baptists. At this meeting they adopted a resolution which included the following: "Resolved, Second, seeing that the so-called Cape Fear Conference has departed from the faith the aforesaid original doctrine of the Free Will Baptist on the subject of sanctification and the baptism of the Holy Ghost, and the speaking in tongues as the only evidence; We, therefore, invite all churches and ministers who believe in the original doctrine as practiced by the Free Will Baptist, set forth in the discipline of the Cape Fear conference prior to the revision in 1899, to unite in the deliberations of this body."

The reference to "the baptism of the Holy Ghost" and "speaking in tongues as the only evidence" in the above resolution suggests that the controversy in the Cape Fear Conference concerning the doctrine of Sanctification was further complicated by the influence of the Pentecostal Movement, which was in its early stage of development in North Carolina and the nation. Most church historians agree that this movement had its beginning in Topeka, Kansas, among the Bible students of C.F. Parham and that it received much publicity as a result of the Azusa Street revival in Los Angeles, California, under the direction of W. J. Seymour. From here Pentecostal leaders spread out across the nation. It was introduced to eastern North Carolina about 1908 by G. B. Cashwell, a holiness minister who, having heard of the manifestation of Spirit baptism among those who had witnessed the Azusa Street revival, went to California where he is said to have received the "baptism of the Holy Ghost." He returned to his home near Dunn, North Carolina, and began a revival in that town which attracted thousands. Many were convinced that "speaking in tongues" was the sign that one had received the "baptism of the Holy Ghost." The fact that this movement made its initial impact in the area of the Cape Fear Conference meant that Free Will Baptists living in that area would likely be subject to its influence. The resolution adopted by the group which met at Shady Grove Church on January 12, 1912, makes it clear that the Pentecostal interpretation of Spirit baptism had indeed been introduced into several churches of the Cape Fear Conference. Those ministers and churches that embraced the holiness version of the doctrine of Sanctification came to be referred to as Free Will Baptist Holiness and some churches actually chose this name to distinguish themselves from other Free Will Baptists. In the course of time they organized three other conferences in North Carolina and then organized a General Conference in order to provide a greater degree of unity to the denomination. Finally, in 1959 they chose the name "Pentecostal Free Will Baptist Church", incorporated the organization, and gave it much greater authority. The denomination was divided into districts with a superintendent over each

district and a general superintendent, along with other officers, presiding over the entire denomination. Their headquarters is located near Dunn, North Carolina, where they also operate a school known as Heritage Bible College. Long Branch Pentecostal Free Will Baptist Church serves both the headquarters and the college community. Long Branch was one of the eight original churches of the Cape Fear Conference in 1855 and prior to that was a member of the Conference of Original Free Will Baptists as early as 1845.

In view of this fact it is strange that some contemporary Pentecostal Free Will Baptists trace their heritage back to the Freewill Baptist movement in New England and to Benjamin Randall. This may be due in part to the fact that prior to 1883 the Cape Fear Conference had adopted the Northern Freewill Baptist Articles of Faith. Of more significance is the fact that Pentecostal Free Will Baptists render a different interpretation of Randall's "cornfield experience" than others have done. They see it as his unique experience of sanctification, a purifying experience, subsequent to regeneration. For this reason they hold that those members of the Cape Fear Conference who refused to accept the doctrine of Sanctification as set forth in their 1899 Articles of Faith had departed from the faith which had been demonstrated in the experience of Benjamin Randall.⁶

Early Actions of the North Carolina Convention

The controversy involving the doctrine of Sanctification and the Pentecostal view of spirit baptism must have drawn attention to the fact that the Cape Fear Conference recognized a different Discipline from that which had been used by Original Free Will Baptists, with slight revisions, since 1812. Therefore, it seemed appropriate that some action was needed to reconcile this difference in order to avoid confusion in matters of doctrine and polity among the churches and conferences belonging to the North Carolina Convention. At the second annual session of the Convention the body agreed to a resolution which would assign to

a committee of nine the task of preparing one Discipline to govern the denomination. R. F. Pittman was appointed as chairman of the committee. With him would serve two persons chosen from each of the four conferences affiliated with the Convention. The recommendations of this committee would be submitted to each conference for its adoption.

Other matters discussed at this session included the location and acquisition of a site for the proposed orphanage. It was reported that Elder B. B. Deans had offered to give a site near Middlesex. Other possible locations were mentioned and Elder J. E. Davis stated that several persons were ready to provide land and other gifts in kind in order to establish this institution. Better support for the ministry was the topic of another resolution at this session. The possibility of canvassing the members of each local church, asking them to assess themselves according to their ability to pay for the monthly support of their pastor so that ministers could give more time to study and pastoral work, was proposed. During this period there were statements in the *Free Will Baptist* concerning the "backwardness" of some ministers due to a lack of education. They were urged to avail themselves of the opportunity to secure a liberal education. The fact that Ayden Seminary provided such an opportunity was underscored at almost every denominational meeting. At the State Convention in 1914 Professor J. E. Sawyer, who was now serving as principal of the Seminary following the death of Professor Peden, gave an address on education in which he stressed the needs of the school and the consequences of neglecting its support. There was much better representation from local churches as well as the ministry at this session than at the first one in 1913.

The matter of revising the Discipline that was proposed at the annual session in 1914 was again before the convention when it met at Shady Grove Church, a member of the Cape Fear Conference, in September 1915. Because the committee charged with this assignment had failed to meet, the Convention chose a new committee of four men to undertake this task. R. F. Pittman was again appointed as chairman and the committee announced its

intention to meet at the Goldsboro Church the following month. At the next annual session of the Convention in 1916 this Committee on Revision reported that they had met and revised the Discipline and that their work had been ratified by the last sessions of the various conferences. Apparently they had revised only that part of the Discipline which dealt with matters of church polity. Concerning the Articles of Faith the Committee on Revision had approved a form of the Northern Freewill Baptist statement of faith, for when they published the results of their work later that year, the Articles of Faith were the same as that found in the Discipline of the Cape Fear Conference without the change that had been made in the doctrine of Sanctification in 1899. As we shall observe later, this attempt to resolve the two different forms of the Articles of Faith recognized by member conferences of the Convention did not satisfy the majority of the members of the Convention for very long.

Meanwhile, other important actions were being taken at the annual sessions of the Convention. In 1915 an Orphanage Committee was appointed to handle all money received for this cause and to locate a site for the proposed orphanage. At the next annual session the report of the Executive Committee included a recommendation that the Orphanage Committee chosen at the previous session was to become the Board of Trustees and to be composed of the same members. The Board of Trustees would constitute a legal entity that would have the necessary authority to acquire property and to take any additional actions to establish the orphanage. Interest in this project began to show an increase among Free Will Baptists when the Board received a gift of fifty acres of land from B. B. Deans of Middlesex and began the construction of the first building, a three story structure with thirty-one large rooms, designed to accommodate boys and girls as well as staff members. It would also provide a dining room and other necessary facilities until other buildings could be added.

Because the Temperance Movement had made substantial progress in America during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, including the adoption of prohibition legislation in most

states, the idea of total abstinence had become an accepted view among evangelical Christians throughout the nation. Many were already proposing that prohibition should become the law of the land by amendment of the federal constitution. Thus in 1916 the Temperance Committee in its report to the North Carolina State Convention of Original Free Will Baptists took a strong stand against the use of alcohol in any form, including a recommendation that grape juice be used instead of wine for communion services. They also went on record as favoring nation-wide prohibition, an action that would require a favorable vote in Congress and ratification by three-fourths of the states. The Eighteenth Amendment to the federal constitution was proclaimed in effect on January 16, 1920.

Organization of the Co-operative General Association

An important action of another kind was taken at the 1916 session of the Convention. This was the appointment of R. F. Pittman to represent the State Convention at the "National Convention at Pattonsburg, Missouri," with his travel expenses to be paid by the Convention. This meeting in Missouri was called by a group of ministers in the Mid-West whose aim was to rally together those Northern Freewill Baptists that refused to become a part of the merger with the Northern Baptists. The fact that it was referred to as a National Convention would suggest that the dream of uniting all other Free Will Baptists was still alive.

This meeting, which was held at Philadelphia Church near Pattonsburg, was convened on December 17, 1916. The following day the Co-operative General Association of Freewill Baptists was organized with Rev. John H. Wolfe as moderator and Rev. Ira Waterman as clerk. A constitution and by-laws was adopted and action was taken to purchase a printing establishment which had begun to publish the *New Morning Star*. Rev. S. L. Morris was elected as the editor and this publication was adopted as the official organ of the association. After R. F. Pittman was given an opportunity to speak to the body, the literature published by the

Free Will Baptist Printing Company at Ayden, North Carolina, was endorsed as well as the Seminary at Ayden and the Orphanage which was to be built at Middlesex, North Carolina. It was decided that a denominational school should be established in the Mid-West area and the Executive Board was charged with executing this decision. John H. Wolfe was designated by a resolution of the body to be the president of the proposed school.

In order to provide the Association with a statement of faith and form of church government the ministers and delegates assembled at this first session adopted the Freewill Baptist Treatise as revised and approved by the Northern General Conference of Freewill Baptists meeting at Harper's Ferry, West Virginia, in 1899. This was a very significant decision in view of the fact that this Treatise in revised form was later adopted by the National Association of Free Will Baptists at its first session in Nashville, Tennessee, in 1935. The Articles of Faith in this Treatise were still later adopted by the North Carolina State Convention, replacing the Articles of Faith which had been recognized by Original Free Will Baptists since 1812.

The constitution of the Co-operative General Association stated that regular meetings were to be held once every three years but that adjourned sessions might be held as conditions required. Therefore, the Association met in an adjourned session on December 26, 1917, at Tecumseh College in Tecumseh, Oklahoma. Freewill Baptists had received a gift of property, including two buildings in the town of Tecumseh, to establish a college. The college property was dedicated at the Sunday morning worship service. Rev. R. F. Pittman preached the dedicatory sermon. In order to prepare for the opening of the college in the fall of 1916 President John H. Wolfe had moved to Tecumseh. He had also arranged for the printing office of the *New Morning Star* to be relocated on the college campus.

Among the items of business at this session were: The decision to employ Rev. Samra Smith as General Secretary of the Association, the endorsement of Reverends H. M. and Lizzie McAdams as missionaries to the Island of Barbados, a pledge to

support the ratification of an amendment to the federal constitution for nation-wide prohibition of the sale of alcoholic beverages, and a proposal to cooperate with the printing company at Ayden to increase the circulation of Sunday school literature with the suggestion that it be published under the head of the Co-operative General Association of Freewill Baptists. The body also voted to have an adjourned session of the Association at Paintsville, Kentucky, on December 25, 1918.

At this adjourned session in 1918 there were the usual reports of the General Secretary, standing committees, denominational institutions, and field superintendents, whose major task was to encourage support for the various causes of the denomination. North Carolina Free Will Baptists were represented at this session by R. F. Pittman, S. H. Styron, and Thomas E. Beaman. In his report to the Association the General Secretary expressed the hope that as a result of his correspondence with the brethren in Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Tennessee, that Free Will Baptists in these states would be represented at this session; however, only the Cumberland Association in Tennessee had sent a delegate, Rev. J. L. Welch. A wide-spread epidemic of influenza had prevented some delegates from attending this session.

The next session, which was held in Nashville, Tennessee, on December 24-27, 1919, was the last one which delegates from North Carolina and Tennessee would attend for several years. According to Damon C. Dodd (*The Free Will Baptist Story*, p. 116) the key issue at this session was that of reaching agreement on points of doctrine. Among other things the practice of feet-washing caused some dissension in the fellowship. While the delegates from North Carolina and Tennessee held that it should be regarded as a church ordinance, delegates from the West felt it should be left to each local church to decide whether or not they wished to observe it. When a vote was taken on the question, the decision was rendered in favor of leaving this matter to be decided by local groups. This outcome is not surprising in view of the fact that Northern Freewill Baptists had long before decided to make the practice of feet-washing optional rather than treat it as an

ordinance of the church while most Free Will Baptists in the Southeast held that feet-washing was a church ordinance. As a result of the different views on this and other matters the Free Will Baptist organizations in North Carolina and Tennessee which had participated in the Co-operative General Association decided to withdraw from that organization.⁷

When the North Carolina State Convention held its annual session in September 1920, there was much discussion about the possibility of reviving the General Conference which had expired after the triennial session of that body in 1910. Earlier the Executive Committee in a meeting on February 20, 1920, had voted to approve the action of the North Carolina delegation in withdrawing from the Co-operative General Association when that body held its meeting in Nashville, Tennessee. At its eighth annual session in September the Convention agreed by motion "to appoint a committee of three to take in hand the work of cooperating with other true and loyal Free Will Baptist bodies in the perfection of a national organization." J. W. Alford, J. C. Griffin, and S. H. Styron were appointed to serve on this committee. The fact that there were visiting delegates from the Cumberland Association in Tennessee, the Muscle Shoals Association in Alabama, and the South Carolina Conference suggests that these men were invited guests who would likely be interested in forming an organization of Free Will Baptists in the Southeast. Later in this session a resolution was adopted endorsing the idea of an organization which would bring together "all true Free Will Baptists," with the pledge that the Convention would enter this organization "with all its energies and resources." The resolution further declared that a committee be chosen to correspond with other conventions, conferences, and associations, inviting them to unite in said organization; and that the first meeting shall be held at the church in Nashville, Tennessee, by invitation of its pastor, J. L. Welch.

At this session of the North Carolina Convention in 1920 there was more evidence that the State Convention had succeeded in reaching out to other Free Will Baptists in western North

Carolina. Delegates from the French Broad and the Jack's Creek associations and the Rock Fish Conference registered at the Convention. Although the French Broad had been received into the Convention the previous year, the other two church bodies were represented for the first time at this session.

Still another important action taken at this session in 1920 was the final resolution of an issue which was first brought up at the 1914 session involving the Articles of Faith. We have seen that a committee reported in 1916 that they had met and revised the Discipline, which had been approved by the conferences, and that they had made an effort to unify the Articles of Faith. Even though their report was approved by the body and a revised Discipline was published later that year, there was some dissatisfaction with the results, for Elder D. W. Alexander presented a resolution at the Convention in 1919 which he would authorize "a committee of one whose doctrine is unquestioned to prepare a treatise on our faith." Then in an Executive Committee meeting on February 10, 1920, a motion was approved that "Elder J. W. Alford be appointed to prepare a treatise for North Carolina Free Will Baptists in accordance with a resolution passed at the last session of the State Convention." However, this proposed treatise was not prepared, for when the Convention met in September of that year, a motion was approved which called for 2,000 Disciplines as revised (in 1916) to be printed and "that the Articles of Faith remain as they are found in the old disciplines used by the Central, Western, and Eastern conferences." Thus, the revised Rules of Church Discipline were retained while the Articles of Faith in the 1916 revision were set aside in favor of the Former Articles of Faith, which were based on the Confession of 1660 and which had served as the doctrinal statement of Free Will Baptists in North Carolina since 1812. These Articles of Faith would continue to be recognized by the North Carolina conferences and the State Convention until 1948 when the Convention approved the statement of faith in the Treatise of the National Association of Free Will Baptists.

The Revived General Conference

The first session of the revived General conference met at Cofer's Chapel Church in Nashville, Tennessee, with delegates from Tennessee, Alabama, Georgia, and North Carolina in attendance. The host pastor was Rev. J. L. Welch, a leader in the Cumberland Association in Tennessee. The meeting began with a discussion of the importance of Free Will Baptists throughout the nation being united. They had in mind, it seems, those Free Will Baptists who agreed on matters of faith and practice. Apparently, they were sensitive to the differences between themselves and the brethren who had joined together to form the Co-operative General Association. In fact these two groups had developed out of separate traditions and with separate histories. The experiences which had brought these two groups into existence in separate parts of the nation had shaped their outlook and their attitudes toward each other. Not even a common name and many shared doctrines could hold them together against the strains that pulled them apart.

The Mid-West group had resulted from their refusal to be part of the merger between the Northern Freewill Baptists and the Northern Baptists. Located in the Mid-West, they were somewhat isolated from the centers of power in their historic denomination. Moreover, they appear to have been more independent in their thinking than their brethren in the East. This may be attributed in part to the fact that their local and state organizations were of more recent origin and they had not become fully integrated into the organization of the denomination at the level of its General Conference.

On the other hand the Southern group had originated mainly in North Carolina with some local groups, like the Chattahoochee Association in Georgia, having developed spontaneously out of a Regular Baptist background. The largest concentration of Free Will Baptists was in eastern North Carolina, where they had developed institutions in advance of those Free Will Baptists located in other states of the South. There a distinctive tradition

had also developed by which the denomination and its member churches could be identified and there Free Will Baptists had gained a certain level of recognition not always enjoyed by those living in other states. Yet not until the end of the nineteenth century had there been any concerted effort to draw together the Free Will Baptists in the South into a single organization. Even that effort had not succeeded beyond the year 1910 when the General Conference held its last meeting in Florence, Alabama.

Now the Southern group was making a fresh attempt to form an organization to be known as the General Conference of the Original Free Will Baptists of the United States. The following officers were elected at the first meeting in 1921: J. L. Welch, president; D. W. Alexander, vice-president; E. C. Morris, recording secretary; J. E. Hodgins, treasurer; Neal H. Parish, field secretary. A constitution was adopted which limited the right to vote only to those who were legal representatives of the various bodies belonging to the Conference. This meant that unless a minister was elected as a delegate by his local association or conference, he could not exercise the right to vote. The general effect of this provision in the constitution was that a majority of the delegates attending the General Conference in succeeding years were ministers. The constitution also provided that the Conference was to meet annually, the place to be designated by the Executive Committee.

The second session of the General Conference was held at the Marshall Free Will Baptist Church, Marshall, North Carolina, located in the mountains not far from Asheville. The women had a voice at this meeting in the person of Mrs. Alice Lupton, who represented the Woman's Home Mission of the Eastern Conference of North Carolina and who was a leader in the organization of women's groups in local churches. She was invited to address this session on "The Value of Church Auxiliaries." The delegates at this session endorsed the Free Will Baptist Leagues and adopted a constitution for that organization. The idea for developing youth organizations in local Free Will Baptist churches had taken hold in various locations but the name Free Will Baptist League was said

to have been used first in Nashville, Tennessee, and suggested to the North Carolina State Convention by Rev. J. L. Welch, pastor of Cofer's Chapel Church in Nashville. The leagues became an important agency for training church members in the following decades. In 1926 the F. W. B. League Quarterly was established with Rev. Thomas E. Beaman as editor. The Quarterly was published at Ayden and sent to local churches where leagues had been organized. The local leagues usually met on Sunday evenings to study a variety of topics aimed at encouraging Christian growth and strengthening the local church as well as the entire denomination.

The General Conference was convened each year at various locations in the Southeast until 1938 with a gradual increase in representation from the Free Will Baptist organizations in that area of the nation. Since the financial resources made available to the boards and committees of the conference were quite limited, few accomplishments could be made beyond that of sharing information and ideas and encouraging support for projects and enterprises endorsed by the Conference. No new institutions were formed by action of the Conference during this period; rather, those which began as a result of the initiative taken in the state conventions or local church bodies were generally regarded as denominational causes worthy of support. Institutions in North Carolina, including Ayden Seminary-Eureka College, the printing establishment at Ayden and the Orphanage at Middlesex were considered as agencies or enterprises of the denomination at large and there were regular reports of their progress as well as appeals for their support.

An indication of the desire of the printing establishment at Ayden to serve Free Will Baptists beyond North Carolina is the number of letters and announcements published in the *Free Will Baptist* that came from all over the South. These were to be found in almost every issue of the paper during this period. Beginning in the issue for September 5, 1923, a page was designated "Georgia Department", to be used to promote the work being carried on in the churches and church organizations in that state.

It was edited by Neal H. Parrish of Hahira, Georgia. Letters intended for readers of the *Baptist* were frequently included in its pages. These were written by church leaders or by anyone who wished to share information or ideas that might inspire or encourage the faithful. Denominational identity and loyalty was very often a theme that was evident in the writings of those who contributed to the pages of the *Baptist*.

The North Carolina Convention in the 1920's

In the North Carolina Convention a great deal of attention was focused on the needs of its developing institutions and programs during the 1920's. The Orphanage admitted its first children in May, 1920. The following year the Orphanage Board reported that there were thirty-eight children at the Home, and that the total value of the property, fixtures, etc. was in excess of \$90,000. The Ayden Seminary was closed during the school year 1920-21, but work on the new college building was begun during the next year. That project would require several years to complete. A new interest in foreign missions was evident at the Convention in 1921. Although the convention had endorsed Reverends H. M. and Lizzie McAdams as missionaries to Barbados in 1918, the couple had returned to the states after only a few months and had reported this to the convention in 1919. Since then the Convention had decided to withdraw from the Co-operative General Association and therefore had no foreign mission program. A resolution approved by the convention in 1921 urged that liberal contributions be made to this cause and that the money received be placed on deposit until someone could be approved by the Mission Board for appointment to a foreign field.

At the 1921 session of the Convention the system of designating a Sunday in each of five months of the year to emphasize support for denominational causes was instituted. Ministers were asked to address the needs of these enterprises in their sermons on the designated Sundays and the schedule of these Sundays was published in the *Free Will Baptist* regularly. It was hoped that by

this means the stewardship of the churches would show a significant increase. Much emphasis was placed on the support of denominational causes at the annual sessions of the Convention during this period. The needs of the Ayden Seminary and the building program for a new college received special attention in view of the anticipated costs of this undertaking.

In the report of the Executive Committee of the Convention at the 1921 session there were two motions which reflected a certain degree of antagonism toward the views of private individuals or representatives of other Christian groups that appeared in the pages of the *Free Will Baptist* when these views appeared to be in conflict with the beliefs of Free Will Baptists. One of these motions reads as follows: "On motion we instruct the editor and manager of our church paper to censure and withhold from publication all articles that do not thoroughly harmonize with our articles of faith." Since no particular article is singled out, it is impossible to determine what views had been expressed to which objection might have been raised. Another motion is more specific. It reads: "On motion we do not recognize as Free Will Baptist and that we debar from our pulpits all ministers belonging to the Co-operative General Association." Since the State Convention has always been an advisory body, having no judiciary authority over its member conferences or local churches, it is difficult to see how this action could be binding on any local congregation or minister. Nevertheless, this feeling was still evident the following year when the Convention approved a resolution which threatened to disfellowship any church that allowed a minister from the Co-operative General Association to labor in that church. For reasons not entirely clear to us a spirit of bitterness still existed in the minds of some toward the leaders of that organization with which the North Carolina Convention had been affiliated from 1916 until 1919. Perhaps it was created in part by the dissension at the 1919 session of that association. It may have been aggravated by subsequent exchanges between members of these two religious bodies. During 1922-23 the Reverends H. M. and Lizzie McAdams from Texas were conduct-

ing revivals in North Carolina and were well received by the friends which they had made in their evangelistic work. But there was apparently some opposition to their work on the part of certain leading Free Will Baptist ministers in this state. It is remarkable that members of these two bodies were able to "bury the hatchet" fourteen years later when the North Carolina State Convention became a part of the National Association of Free Will Baptists.

During 1922 an interesting development toward cooperation with another denomination was initiated. The Christian (O'Kelly-ite) Conference in North Carolina made overtures toward the Free Will Baptists of North Carolina. During this period advertisements appeared in the *Free Will Baptist* offering the services of Elon College, sponsored by the Christian Church, to Free Will Baptist students. An invitation was extended by the Christian Conference to the Executive Committee of the State Convention to send representatives to a joint meeting of representatives of the two religious bodies with the view of cultivating a closer fellowship between them. A commission of six men was chosen by the Executive Committee on January 3, 1923, to meet with a similar group from the Christian Conference. The meeting was held at the Bland Hotel in Raleigh on February 12. News of the meeting was circulated among Free Will Baptists, some of whom were suspicious of the purpose of such a gathering. W. B. Everett, financial agent of the proposed college at Ayden, had attended the meeting as an observer and later sought to quell the rumors about the possible results of such a meeting. In an article in the *Free Will Baptist* he appealed to readers to unite behind the enterprises and auxiliaries of the denomination in order to complete the work they had undertaken.

W. P. Lawrence of Elon College submitted an article which was published in the issue of the *Free Will Baptist* for July 11, 1923, on "What I think of Christian Unity." In it he lamented the divisions among Christians, the existence of denominational bigotry and prejudice, and called for a vision of the Church united. In that same issue S. H. Styron responded to criticisms of those who objected to the recent meeting in Raleigh and assured his

readers that what has been called the "Coalition Movement" i.e., a union of the two denominations, would not materialize. Some were anticipating a stormy session of the State Convention that year, but this did not happen. When it convened in September at Reedy Branch Church, Pitt County, the body rejected the action of the Executive Committee in appointing a commission to meet with representatives of the Christian Conference. Professor W. A. Harper, president of Elon College, was present at that session as a fraternal delegate from the North Carolina Christian Conference and was on the program to address the Convention on the subject of "Christian Unity." Afterwards a rising vote of thanks was extended to him for his address and at the same time he was welcomed as a fraternal delegate. It was reported in the minutes of this session that the president of the Convention gave the assurance that Free Will Baptists would be represented at the forthcoming meeting of the Christian Conference in November. Although there was some optimism on the part of a few leaders that closer ties between those two church bodies would develop, there was too much opposition and rancor among Free Will Baptists to permit this to happen. Just how much of this opposition was rooted in the experience of an earlier generation of Free Will Baptists with the Disciples movement in the 1840's is a matter of conjecture.

At this eleventh session of the Convention in 1923 a resolution was adopted to appoint a committee on a Retired Ministers' Home. They were to have authority to secure contributions and to decide where and when to begin construction as soon as sufficient means were available. This was an ambitious proposal, but it was not destined to become a reality. Unfortunately, it came at a time when there were already major development plans being carried out to provide a building for the proposed college at Ayden and the Orphanage at Middlesex was now trying to provide support for fifty-eight children and a staff of six persons. Furthermore, this part of the nation had still not recovered from the recession of the early 1920's. Prior to this time almost nothing had been done to aid retired ministers of the denomination beyond occasional

"love offerings" for individual ministers. Most pastors in the denomination were bi-vocational and therefore did not depend entirely on the churches for their support. But lacking any retirement benefits, some ministers and their wives lived on the edge of poverty after they were no longer able to earn a living. It would be years before an effective retirement program for ministers would be launched by the Convention, though a resolution was adopted in 1924 to establish a Board of Superannuation whose duty was "to look after the financial aid of our infirm, aged, or retired ministers who may be in need of such aid."

A "Five Year Program" was adopted by the Convention in 1924 with the aim of developing "every church into an evangelistic, educational, and social force in its community," resulting in a "mighty impact" on the entire state. The goals of this Five Year Program were:

1. Ten thousand additions to our churches;
2. A college valued at \$500,000;
3. An Orphanage valued at \$200,000;
4. A publication business under denominational control with \$10,000 capital;
5. One hundred ministerial students and three hundred other students in college;
6. An annual income of \$150,000 for education, orphanage, missions, and other denominational work;
7. A Board of Superannuation with a \$10,000 endowment;
8. Raising the ministerial standards; and
9. The following auxiliaries in 90 per cent of our churches: Sunday Schools, Free Will Baptist Leagues, Mission and Ladies Aid Societies.

The above goals had earlier been adopted by the Ministerial Association, having been submitted by Thomas E. Beaman to that body. A committee of three was then appointed to present this program to the people at large. That it was adopted by the Convention suggests that many thought the program was desirable

and perhaps achievable. However, since it called for raising much larger sums of money than had ever been given by Free Will Baptists to any cause, much of this program would not be realized in the 1920's. Without a sound program of stewardship training and a greater commitment to these causes it would be unlikely that many of these goals could be achieved by North Carolina Free Will Baptists in that decade or the next.

An attempt was made at this session to place the Convention and its various causes on a budget system with a Board of Finance authorized to distribute all money received from the churches to the different enterprises on a percentage basis. Each church would be asked to send to this Board a definite amount of money, based on its membership and their ability to contribute. This practice of assigning quotas to each church had only limited results in this period, however, since each church could decide how much they would contribute to denominational causes. Furthermore, there was not a sufficient record of giving by many of the churches on which to base such quotas. The value of such quotas then or at any time was to set goals for each congregation to meet in order to advance the entire program of the Convention. If the proposed Five Year Program was to have any success, the full support of the churches would have to be enlisted.

A statistical table in the minutes of the Convention for 1924 shows that there were a total of 320 churches affiliated with eleven Free Will Baptist conferences or associations throughout North Carolina with a total membership of 28,681. However, only six conferences were represented at this session and one of them was represented by a single church (Oak Grove Church in the Pee Dee Association). One church in the Jack's Creek Association was represented by letter. Although an effort had been made to encourage churches in areas of the state beyond Eastern North Carolina to become involved in the Convention and its program, there was as yet not much progress. One reason may have been the fact that all sessions of the Convention had thus far been held in churches located in the eastern part of the state where the greatest concentration of Free Will Baptist churches were to be

found. But another reason was the difference in the style of worship and the cultural values of people living in rural areas in the western part of the state. That such barriers were difficult to overcome may indicate the extent to which cultural norms prevent Christians from coming together to achieve common goals.

In this same statistical table there were a total of 247 ministers holding membership in the various conferences. In his report as historian of the Convention the following year Rev. E. T. Phillips estimated that less than one-third of the number of ministers enrolled were pastors of churches in view of the fact that some ministers served as many as four or five churches. Very few congregations had full-time pastors and a few more had worship services on two Sundays in each month. He questioned the wisdom of ordaining so many ministers without their having a ministry to perform. "Has it not been too easy a matter to get to be a Free Will Baptist ordained minister?" he asked. He was clearly making a comment on the lack of sufficient requirements for ordination. In his statement he lamented the fact that there were so few who were preparing themselves for "the greatest calling among the sons of men."

An important feature of these sessions of the Convention during the 1920's was the amount of time spent in teaching and inspiring the ministers and delegates on various aspects of church organization and the outreach of the church. An able minister or lay person would be assigned a topic for an address, the purpose of which was to inform or to motivate those in attendance to be more diligent and faithful to the church or to one or another of the denominational programs. This period was a time of moderate growth in membership and in the number of churches. Also, Free Will Baptists had begun to have a vision of the tasks which God had given them to do. More than ever before they were looking beyond the immediate concerns of the local church and striving to respond to the call of God in the needs of the world. For many of them that world was still small, no larger than the region where they lived or perhaps as large as the United States. But for some there was a growing consciousness that the world was much larger

and that as many as would hear the gospel were to be brought under the Lordship of Christ. Before such a task could begin the faithful few had begun to see that they must first gird up their loins and prepare to do God's work in the world. The church must do its part in organizing its members for greater efficiency and equip them with knowledge and skills for more effective service. Some examples of the kinds of topics on which speakers addressed the Convention were: "Organizing the Church for Efficient Service" by L. E. Ballard, "The Ideal Church" by E. C. Morris, and "Duties of Pastors and Churches to Denominational Work" by J. C. Griffin. In addition to these addresses the Introductory Sermon on the first day of each annual session and the Convention Sermon on the second day were often devoted to themes related to strengthening and building up the churches and the causes sponsored by the denomination.

There was some evidence that this enthusiasm for growth and development was yielding results. The field secretary reported in 1927 that there were a total of 329 churches with a membership of 31,000. The value of local church property was put at \$521,800 and the value of denominational property was \$305,000. It must be said that many of the associations and local churches included in these figures were only nominally involved in the work of the Convention.

This enthusiasm for "enlarging the tent and strengthening the stakes" was due not only to an awareness of the developments that had taken place since the North Carolina Convention was organized in 1913 but also to an awareness that other Protestant denominations had launched more extensive efforts in the early 1920's, aimed at making the world more Christian. Goals in the hundreds of millions of dollars had been established by the main-line denominations to finance these efforts. The New World Movement of the Northern Baptists, for example, had set a goal of \$1,000,000 but only half of that amount was actually raised. The goals of other major denominations were less ambitious, yet the campaigns to raise such large sums captured the imagination of many who desired to see the churches make a lasting impact on the

lives of millions of people throughout the world. The national press gave much publicity to these ambitious plans of the major denominations and leaders among Free Will Baptists must have had some knowledge of these developments.

There was, in fact, a prevailing spirit of optimism among most Americans during the years following World War I, for this nation had not suffered the terrible scourge of war that had practically destroyed a generation of young men in Europe but had instead won a victory in "a war to end all wars" and had shown itself to be a major world power. The confidence of most Americans had not been shaken by the war and they were anxious to get on with the business of making a better life for themselves and their children. Many were caught up in the desire to forget the needs and problems of people living abroad and to discover "the good life" here at home.

Meanwhile, among Free Will Baptists there was a growing interest in working with young people in order to provide guidance and encouragement at a crucial time in their lives as well as to develop in them an appreciation for the life and mission of the church. Much of this concern was associated with the organization and promotion of Free Will Baptist Leagues. The General Conference of Original Free Will Baptists had chosen Mrs. Alice E. Lupton as General Secretary for the Leagues and had enlisted writers to prepare the literature to be used by members of the local leagues. Mrs. Gertrude Ballard was designated as editor of the League Department and her articles, which appeared regularly in the *Free Will Baptist*, provided news of league activity as well as promotional items. On November 1, 1926, a campaign was launched to increase the number of new leagues in North Carolina churches and to enhance the effectiveness of local leagues through the training of leaders and holding rallies in each union district. Thomas E. Beaman was assigned the post of campaign director and field secretaries were chosen for each of the conferences in the state. Forms were sent to each church requesting information about their work with young people. The campaign director was pledged to keep the churches informed concerning the progress of

the campaign. For several decades the leagues contributed substantially to the development of young people as leaders in their local churches and in the denomination at large.

There was growing interest also in women's organizations in local churches. At first they were called either Ladies Aid Societies or Home Mission Societies. Women in these organizations were usually very active in their local churches and were always seeking ways by which women could serve the communities where they lived as well as the benevolent causes sponsored by the denomination. With a desire to lend support to women's organizations in local churches district organizations were formed during the 1920's, usually in each conference affiliated with the State Convention. Before that decade women had played a minor role in the official activities of the denomination with the exception of individual women whose desire to serve some cause had thrust them into the public arena for a brief period. The wives of leading ministers were more likely to be known across the denomination. Gradually other women came to be recognized for their contributions through women's organizations at the local and district levels. Finally, the initiative was taken to organize a state convention of women's organizations in North Carolina. The first session of the State Woman's Auxiliary Convention was held at the Free Will Baptist Church in Goldsboro, North Carolina, on May 11, 1927. By creating their own organizations women were thereby able to use their talents in the service of the church. Through the pages of the church paper as well as in their own literature they repeatedly expressed their desire to contribute to the progress of the denomination and the welfare of the churches to which they belonged. Some ministers found that when they publicly supported these women in their efforts, they were likely to see results in terms of greater support for both the local church and the denominational causes.

One of those causes which was gaining attention and support from the churches was the Orphanage. By 1926 the number of children being cared for had increased to a total of eighty-two. A new dormitory for boys with fourteen rooms had been built and a

matron was employed to supervise the occupants. A fund drive to raise the \$12,000 needed to pay off the indebtedness on this building was begun in 1926 and by September of the following year two-thirds of that amount had been raised. Elementary school classes were operating on the campus with four teachers employed, but the following year it was necessary to reduce that number to three. The Board of Trustees even recommended that a suitable school building be erected as soon as possible. A church had been organized at the Orphanage with forty-nine members. There were more applications for children needing a home than the available facilities could accommodate; therefore, many had to be denied admission. Concert classes were now being taken on tour to visit churches by prior arrangement so that Free Will Baptists could meet some of the children and hear them sing or recite during worship services. In this way, it was felt, even those who never visited the Orphanage could see for themselves why such an institution was needed and how they could help to support it. During this period the tradition of holding special services at the Orphanage on Thanksgiving Day was begun. On such occasions those who visited the Orphanage were persuaded of the value of the services being rendered on behalf of the children there.

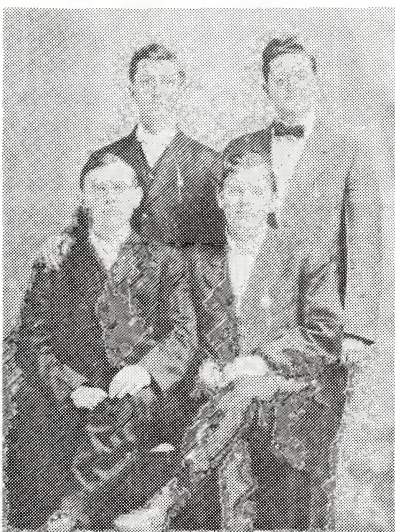
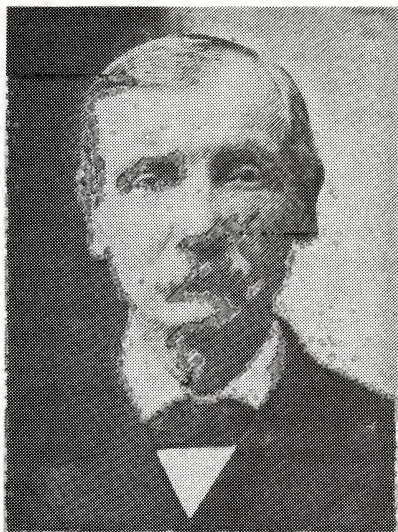
During the 1920's North Carolina Free Will Baptists could feel that progress was being made in the development of institutions and programs that gave promise of strengthening the denomination and broadening its outreach. Contacts with other Free Will Baptist organizations in the southern and the western parts of the state had begun to develop a feeling of identity on the part of these associations with the institutions of the denomination, including the State Convention. Men like Bob Self, from the Asheville area, and Loy E. Ballard, who was active in youth work as well as other kinds of ministry, had helped to bring the French Broad Association into the Convention. Self was known for his work as a revivalist in the East as well as in the Asheville area and was elected as state evangelist by the Convention. He led in the building of a camp meeting facility near Asheville which he hoped would become an assembly for young people. Thus he anticipated

the need for a facility which Free Will Baptists would acquire two decades later.

Free Will Baptists in the old north state were also becoming more conscious of the ties which bound them to their brethren in other states. Here the *Baptist* paper played a significant role in that every issue contained items from individuals or news from church bodies, particularly in the Southeastern states. Ayden Seminary and later Eureka College also contributed to the identification of people outside North Carolina with these institutions, which attracted some students from South Carolina, Georgia, and elsewhere. Likewise, the General Conference, which was revived in 1921, provided organizational unity through its annual meetings at which North Carolina was always represented. Furthermore some ministers from other states were almost always present at the annual sessions of the North Carolina Convention and at the various annual conferences in the state. These men generally felt a strong identity with the church sponsored institutions in North Carolina and frequently referred to them as "our institutions," especially the seminary or Eureka College and the printing establishment in Ayden. Leaders in North Carolina were anxious to cultivate such ties with other Free Will Baptists, not only in the interests of institutional development but also in giving real substance to the idea of unity among all Free Will Baptists, at least in the South. Thus, the General Conference was often referred to in North Carolina as the National Conference.

The General conference held its eighth annual session at Eureka College on June 13-15, 1928. It was an opportunity for Free Will Baptists from other states to see the new facilities, which were first occupied in September 1926, and to meet the larger number of persons in North Carolina who might be expected to attend this session. There were reports from the Field Secretary, J. L. Welch; Department of Sunday School Administration, Thomas E. Beaman; Secretary of Women's Work, Mrs. F. K. Polston; Free Will Baptist Leagues, Mrs. Alice E. Lupton; and reports from various committees on Finance, Missions, Literature, and Obituaries. It was in many ways a typical meeting of this

body. There were some signs of progress in organizational activity, especially in the reports of Women's Work and Leagues. There was an endorsement of Eureka College in the report of the Committee on Education and an appeal for contributions to the College "between now and January 1, 1929." The report referred to a campaign proposed by the Board of Trustees to relieve the school of its present indebtedness and urged the entire denomination to stand behind the campaign. The outcome of this campaign would determine whether or not the College could continue to operate. An account of the beginnings of Ayden Seminary and its successor, Eureka College, is the subject of the next chapter.



Top: Thomas E. Peden; John E. Sawyer

Bottom: E. L. StClaire; J. C. Griffin, L. L. Smith-standing
W. B. Everett, R. F. Pittman-sitting

Chapter XI

Ayden Seminary and Eureka College¹



Throughout the nineteenth century the Free Will Baptist denomination showed little interest in providing educational opportunity either for its ministers or for those who would enter other vocations. Meanwhile, other denominations in North Carolina and the South generally were busy establishing academies, seminaries, and colleges, for the training of their ablest minds. Even though the Free Will Baptist churches showed significant gains in membership between 1853 and 1900, their failure to provide schools for the education of young people and to encourage these young people to achieve the highest level of learning available to them may have been one of the greatest errors in judgment of their entire history.

In the last decade of the nineteenth century, a few forward-looking men in the Pitt County area began to see that definite steps must be taken to remedy this lack of any educational program among Free Will Baptists. In March 1896 at a Union Meeting held with the Spring Branch Church, Pitt County, the subject of establishing a school was discussed with much enthusiasm. Someone proposed that a stock company be set up to secure funds for the erection of a building. The Union appointed a committee to draft bylaws and to solicit those who would purchase shares of stock. Several persons present that day subscribed for shares and later the committee set a time and place for the stockholders to meet for the election of officers. At the appointed time they met and chose the following as a Board of Directors: J. M. Barfield, president; T. F. Harrison, secretary; W. F. Hart, treasurer; E. H. Craft; E. E. Dail; A. L. Harrington; and W. H. Harris. A building committee was appointed consisting of W. F. Hart as foreman, and A. L. Harrington and J. M. Barfield as members. It was decided that the school should be located in the town of Ayden, which had a population of about 1,500 and was served by the Atlantic Coastline Railroad.

Meanwhile, the number of subscribers for shares of stock had increased to eighty-nine by May 27, as reported by *The Free Will Baptist*, and subscribers were urged to pay all or part of what they had subscribed by July 2 and the remainder by January 1, 1897. In that same issue of the *Baptist*, T. F. Harrison in a brief article on "Education" wrote, "It (the school) should be of great and profound interest to all F. W. B. inasmuch as our future success and advancement depend on an education." He proceeded to tell how it would especially benefit preachers, who have so often struggled with the disadvantage of having no education. As co-author of the *History of North Carolina Free Will Baptists*, he died on October 24, 1897, at the age of twenty-four, soon after the manuscript was submitted to the press. Had he lived, he would likely have played an important role in the development of the seminary as a member of the first Board of Directors.

As soon as enough money could be raised through subscrip-

tions for the purchase of stock, the work on the first building was begun. It was built on Lee Street in Ayden, a two-story frame structure containing classrooms, a well-lighted library, and a society hall. Several years later this building was enlarged and an auditorium added. As soon as the original structure was completed early in 1898, the first pupils were enrolled under the principalship of Professor J. E. B. Davis, son of the late Elder Daniel Davis, who had been a leading minister in the Western Conference of Free Will Baptists.

The Board of Directors decided that the school should be named the Free Will Baptist Theological Seminary and that it should have a theological department for the training of ministers. In order to provide instruction of the quality that was desired, they looked outside North Carolina to find the right person. In this search they had the good fortune to obtain the services of a man well advanced in years who was willing to serve as principal of the school and teacher of the theological department, the Rev. Thomas E. Peden, A.M., of Sciotoville, Ohio.

The records of the General Assembly of North Carolina reveal that on March 4, 1901, an act to incorporate the Free Will Baptist Theological Seminary was ratified by the General Assembly. This granted to the Board of Trustees certain corporate rights and powers, including the right to make such bylaws and regulations as deemed necessary to promote the objects of the seminary and the power to grant diplomas. Since some graduates would seek employment as teachers or continue their education in other institutions of the state, the latter provision gave a certain legal status to their diplomas.

In view of the limited number of schools in Pitt County which offered education at all levels and the general needs of the people who would be served, it was decided that the seminary should provide a primary department and several curricula for students in the "higher branches" (equivalent to high school).

A perusal of some of the early catalogues reveals that the faculty carefully planned various courses of study at the seminary, including English and Normal, Theological, Scientific, and

Classical. The emphasis in these curricula was on traditional and classical studies, which probably reflects the kind of education the faculty had received. For instance, courses offered in the first term of the Theological Course included Butler and Dunn Theology, Free Will Baptist Faith, Church History, Greek Testament (Luke), and Homiletics. As additional years were added to the theological curriculum, various liberal arts courses were required, thus assuring graduates that they had received a sound, liberal education along with their theological studies. It is true that the curricula offered seems too advanced and heavily weighted with classical subject matter for students having a limited educational background by today's standards of curriculum planning, but the value of this kind of education may be seen in the kind of men and women who completed at least part of their education at the seminary. The role of the faculty as models was also an important ingredient in the experience of these students at the seminary. A man of the stature of Thomas E. Peden was bound to have a salutary influence on his students, who saw in this man the qualities which they aspired to develop in themselves.

Hundreds of young men and women studied at the seminary between 1898 and 1925 when Eureka College first offered college level courses. In 1905, for example, there were a total of 133 enrolled in the various curricula, not counting duplicates. The school was co-educational in every department. A positive Christian atmosphere was provided with an emphasis on character development. Every effort was made to teach the students the rules of good behavior, courtesy, and etiquette, and to help them appreciate certain of the arts, especially music and drama. The study of the Bible with emphasis on its spiritual and moral lessons was a regular feature of the curriculum. Recitations before the entire assembly of students was a frequent requirement. If a student gave a recitation that was too simple or "old hack," he would be reminded to learn something new. Such experiences taught them to conquer stage fright, to think on their feet, and to appreciate various literary forms. In the early days of the school, a literary society met once each week and literary exercises were

required of each student at least four times each term. The meetings of the literary society provided additional opportunities for drill in composition, elocution, and debate.

Most of the primary students lived in Ayden or the vicinity, but many of those enrolled in other departments came from other towns, some as far away as Georgia. These had to find board and lodging in private homes for there were as yet no dormitories. Costs were kept as low as possible in order to attract students from other places. Tuition was \$5.00 per term of ten weeks in the Common Branches and \$6.00 for Higher Branches. Primary students paid only \$2.50 per term. The charge for board in private homes was eight to ten dollars per month.

In later years the Board of Trustees offered free tuition for ministerial students as a means of encouraging Free Will Baptist candidates for the ministry to prepare themselves for their calling. This matter of persuading ministers to take advantage of the educational opportunities available to them at Ayden became the concern not only of the leaders at the seminary but also of the various Free Will Baptist conferences. The Central Conference took the lead in this effort when in 1900 they adopted an Education Committee report which recommended "that the Conference accept the theological course of study at the seminary as a requirement for ordination of future applicants for the ministry." This was a bold but quite necessary step in lifting the standards of the ministry. While there were many who saw little need of education for the ministry, there were others who argued cogently in behalf of such training. If it seems strange to us that anyone should be opposed to the idea of a more enlightened ministry, we should remember that at the beginning of this century the percentage of high school graduates in the total population of North Carolina was exceedingly low. Education beyond the most rudimentary level was the privilege of the few. Those who wanted to further their education away from home were seldom encouraged to do so because there was little precedent in most Free Will Baptist families for sending children away to school.

Those who saw clearly the educational needs of the denomina-

tion were not slack in promoting this cause. Each year in the Central Conference, the Education Committee called attention to the seminary at Ayden and the benefits which it provided for the lasting good of Free Will Baptists. Appeals were made for its support through offerings in the churches. In 1903 the Eastern Conference proposed to raise \$100 for Professor Peden's salary. The Central Conference adopted the same plan that year and the following year. In 1905 they recommended that a collection be taken once each month for educational work. The next year they urged support for the seminary, insisting "that each church send a contribution to each conference as an educational fund to be used in this great work as the Conference thinks best."

In the May 26, 1909, issue of the *Baptist*, Professor Peden, now president of the seminary, submitted a brief article in which he advocated the view that the seminary should be placed under the direct control of the Triennial General Conference. This would give it a larger constituency and enable it to appeal to every state in the Union for both students and financial support. The conference would then put an agent in the field who would spend his entire time in the interest of the seminary. Peden also believed that this would place the institution in the best possible light to attract the attention of wealthy patrons who were inclined to give large sums of money to such enterprises. He was undoubtedly aware that some educational institutions had received significant gifts from business leaders and industrialists and dared to hope that such good fortune might befall the seminary if it could achieve wider recognition. In his opinion, no local conference or state organization was yet strong enough to support a seminary or college and, for these reasons, it seemed best to entrust that responsibility to the General Conference. But an alternative solution to this problem appealed to most stockholders of the seminary. In the same issue of the *Baptist*, it was announced that the stockholders of the seminary would meet on May 27 to consider a proposal to turn the property of the school over to the various conferences or to the Union Conference. George W. Prescott, chairman of the Board, stated in this announcement that

something like this must be done to give the seminary a larger constituency.

In 1910 Professor Peden resigned his post at the seminary because of his age (seventy-seven years) and declining health. He had served long enough to set the tone of the institution and to provide theological training for a number of men who were serving as pastors of churches. The Board of Trustees elected Professor J. E. Sawyer to succeed him as principal. In that same year on July 5, the stockholders of the seminary approved a resolution directing the board to convey the entire property of the Free Will Baptist Theological Seminary to a Board of Trustees elected by the Central, Eastern, Western and Cape Fear Conferences in North Carolina, the Midway and South Georgia Associations in Georgia, and the South Carolina Conference, a total of fifteen trustees. Any vacancies on this board were to be filled at the regular annual sessions of these church bodies.

This move was aimed at providing wider representation on the Board of Trustees while at the same time it gave full proof that the seminary was indeed a Free Will Baptist institution which could justly look to the entire denomination for its support. A new charter was granted by the state of North Carolina to the Free Will Baptist Seminary and later publications referred to it as Ayden Seminary or as the Free Will Baptist Seminary at Ayden. E. L. St. Claire was employed for a time in 1909 and 1910 as financial agent or "fund raiser" in order to help pay off an indebtedness at the seminary. His role as an evangelist and his articles in the *Baptist* were a great help in obtaining much-needed funds. Because there was a definite need for a dormitory for the girls and single women teachers, in the summer of 1911 a two-story structure was erected on the campus. The building would accommodate twenty-five students, two teachers, and a matron, while also providing a living room and a music room. It was connected to the dining hall by a breeze-way and was furnished with all conveniences then available, including electricity for lighting.

Also in 1911 another project was begun, the enlarging of the main building at the seminary. The materials were purchased and

the work was supervised by W. F. Hart, who had served as a foreman of the original construction. When the new construction was completed in the late summer of that year, it included several spacious rooms fully equipped with modern seating and teachers' desks. In one of these rooms was a good supply of books and reference materials. The building was now a modern facility with double its former capacity. On the first floor was a spacious auditorium, one of the largest in the area. The stage was large enough for dramatic productions and had rooms on either side which could be used for dressing rooms and for storing stage props.

The seating for the auditorium was a major project for someone who had real determination. Anna Phillips, wife of Elder E. T. Phillips who was serving as editor of *The Free Will Baptist*, asked to take on the challenge. Though an invalid, she was a woman of great courage and great heart. She felt confident that the funds for this project could be raised with God's help. Thus she made appeals through the *Baptist*, wrote letters to friends, and asked that prayers be offered to God on behalf of the needs of the seminary. She was largely responsible for a drama in four acts, which was presented in the auditorium on April 5, 1912. The entire proceeds were to be applied to the cost of providing seats for the auditorium. The play, entitled *Dot, The Miner's Daughter*, featured local talent and was described by those who saw it as a great success. The price of admission was twenty-five cents for adults and fifteen cents for children.

Other methods for raising funds to equip the auditorium were also used. Finally, when enough money was available, an order was placed for 487 opera chairs and other furnishings. Because of its size and suitability, the auditorium was later used for many important meetings both by the denomination and by the general public.

Since the seminary was still in debt for the building of the girls' dormitory, Mrs. Anna Phillips decided to help as best she could to pay off this debt. In 1913, she again made appeals through the *Baptist*, asking pastors to receive offerings in their

churches for the seminary. She pointed to the need for a boys' dormitory but urged that contributions be made first to pay the \$1,300 still owed on the girls' dormitory.

Anna Phillips was later honored for her unselfish labors in the cause of Christian education when the State Woman's Auxiliary Convention agreed to establish an educational loan fund for needy students. Many free Will Baptist young people have benefited from the Anna Phillips Loan Fund while pursuing their education at a college of their choice.

In the February 5, 1913, issue of the *Baptist*, there appeared an announcement of the death of Thomas E. Peden, late president of the seminary. He had lived to see both success and failure in his work among Free Will Baptists in the South. The General Conference which he helped to launch was now faltering. He was in attendance when it met the last time at Florence, Alabama, in 1910, but it would not be convened again until 1921. On the other hand, he had played an important role in bringing the seminary to its present stage of development. His contribution as a minister and educator among Free Will Baptists had assured him a place in the memory of all friends of Christian education in the denomination. His funeral was conducted by R. F. Pittman, a graduate of the seminary, and now a member of its faculty, and his body was laid to rest in the Ayden cemetery.

According to a statement in the seminary catalogue for 1912-13, the school had a two-fold purpose: "first, to prepare boys and girls for the best colleges in the state and for the duties of life; second, to offer to young men who feel called to preach the gospel a course in practical homiletics and theology." On the character of the institution, the catalogue further stated: "The qualities that we desire to distinguish our school are these: We seek to make it a place where character is nourished, where intellect is stimulated and properly trained, where health is considered and cared for, and where good manners are fostered."

After the State Convention was organized in 1913, a Board of Education presented its report to the Convention each year. In 1916, their report showed that \$3,651.24 had been received for the

seminary during the previous year, but there was still a deficit of \$750. The number of students enrolled was sixty-nine; there were nine ministerial students and eight graduates. Enrollment in the primary department had decreased because of the rapid growth of public schools in North Carolina with the result that the fifth grade was the lowest grade taught in 1913-14 and by 1917-18 the sixth grade was the lowest with only eight students enrolled in that grade level.

The Beginning of Eureka College

It was clear to everyone that the seminary might soon have to close its doors unless it could be upgraded and begin to offer college work in addition to its high school program and its curriculum for ministerial students. Therefore, a campaign was launched in September 1918 by the Board of Trustees to raise a total of \$50,000 through the sale of bonds for the development of a new administration building for the school. A resolution was passed at the State Convention that year endorsing the sale of these bonds. The campaign likewise received the endorsement of the various conferences which elected representatives to the Board of Trustees of the seminary. These bonds were to mature in ten years and were to bear interest at the rate of five percent per annum. According to the resolution which authorized the sale of these bonds, the proceeds were to be used to improve the seminary property and to erect new buildings.

In 1918, when the nation was at war, farmers in Eastern North Carolina enjoyed an unprecedented prosperity. When the war ended, many friends of the seminary felt that the time had come to make great strides in the development of the seminary with a view toward its becoming a degree-granting college. They understood that it would require more funds than had been raised to operate the seminary in previous years. J. W. Alford was elected by the board as financial agent in 1919. His task was to canvas the churches, conferences, and union meetings in the interest of the campaign to sell bonds. By September 1920 he had

sold about twenty thousand dollars worth. M. C. Prescott was then employed as financial agent to succeed Mr. Alford. The board decided to drop the sale of bonds and to begin the solicitation of cash contributions and pledges for the school. Mr. Prescott presented a proposal at the 1920 session of the State Convention to raise \$300,000 for the erection of an administration building and two dormitories on the new campus site. (The goal was later reduced to \$250,000 by the board.) He pledged to devote his entire time to the campaign, attending conventions, conferences, and union meetings as well as speaking in local churches and canvassing in local areas. At the end of one year, he had raised more than \$20,000 in gifts and pledges. During that same year, the new campus site, consisting of fourteen acres on the east side of the city, was purchased. An architect was employed to prepare plans for a new administration building.

In 1920 the board decided to close the seminary in order to concentrate on the effort to raise funds for the new facility to be located on the new campus. Closing the school proved to be a mistake, for many lost interest when they learned that the seminary was not operating and students had to seek admission to other schools or not continue their education at all. In June 1921 the board arranged for a group of ministerial students to be allowed to attend classes at the Ayden High School while also enrolled in theology courses to be taught by a professor who was employed jointly by the local school board and the seminary board.

Meanwhile, work on the new building was begun under the direction of a building committee chosen by the board which included J. F. Hart, R. F. Pittman, Thomas E. Beaman, W. J. Braxton, M. C. Prescott, B. P. Parks, and Dr. M. Hinnant. A picture of the proposed buildings on the new campus was published in the *Baptist* and announcements concerning plans to build a college at a cost of not less than \$300,000 were sent to the public press. One such announcement which appeared in the *Daily News* stated that a number of towns had offered sites and pledges of support for the proposed college, including Kenly, Micro, Ayden, and Goldsboro. Ayden had made the most attractive offer

as judged by the Board of Trustees, eight of whom had voted for the College to remain there.

It was the hope of many that the first building would soon be ready for use so that Free Will Baptists would at last have their own college, but the progress of construction was soon brought to a standstill because the funds needed to complete this first phase of development were simply not available. One reason for this lack of funds for capital outlay was the economic condition of the farmers in North Carolina and the nation.

In the early 1920's many Americans, especially farmers, felt the effects of a business slump that was brought on, in part, by over-production. During the war, farmers had been encouraged to increase their production of certain crops by the increase in market prices, but when the war ended there were no controls imposed on the amount of acreage in production. Thus when the demand fell, the prices began to slide downward. This economic situation affected the success of the campaign for funds to build facilities on the new campus. Nevertheless, enthusiasm was still high on behalf of the school when W. B. Everett was employed as financial agent in September 1921. He continued in the duties of that office until 1926, promoting interest in the college and soliciting contributions for the completion of the new building.

Despite the difficulty of acquiring capital funds, there was no lack of enthusiasm among those who understood the value of education. Professor R. B. Spencer, who was later to be chosen as first president of Eureka College, was invited to address the State Convention on the subject of education at its 1921 session held at Black Jack Church in Pitt County. The State Convention and the various conferences represented on the Board of Trustees endorsed the campaign for funds while friends of Christian education labored diligently to help the board achieve its goals.

College officials planned a public meeting at the site of the new building under construction in November 1921, when the Central Conference was in session at Elm Grove Church, so that Free Will Baptists and friends could see the work in progress.

On the opening night of the tenth session of the State Conven-

tion in 1922, Miss Nancy Dail of Ayden delivered an address on the subject of "Cooperation." With special emphasis, she pointed to the necessity of Free Will Baptists working together to achieve the most important object before them, that of seeing that the college is built and equipped for the prosperity of the denomination. Such enthusiastic addresses by the advocates of Christian education were not uncommon at the annual sessions of the State Convention during the 1920's.

In the fall of 1922 the Board of Trustees decided to reopen the seminary with Professor R. B. Lee serving as principal. It continued to offer a curriculum for high school students and one for ministerial students. Meanwhile, W. B. Everett was working feverishly to get as many Free Will Baptists as possible involved in raising money for the proposed college. In the fall of 1922 he wrote letters to churches asking for the name of a woman in each church who would take the lead in soliciting gifts for the campaign. Through the pages of the *Baptist* he appealed to everyone to send a contribution so that the goal of completing the new building might be reached by the fall of 1923. Notwithstanding the patient and diligent work of this noble servant, the response was insufficient to enable the dream of an early use of the new facilities to be realized.

In July 1924 Mr. C. E. Prescott was elected superintendent of the seminary. During the week of August 4-8, 1924, a "Summer School for Christian Workers" was held at the seminary, featuring courses in Bible, church organization, church music, the Free Will Baptist League, Sunday school, ladies aid societies, and evangelism. A faculty consisting of ministers was assembled for the week. A series of lectures was scheduled each evening with prominent ministers and laymen as speakers. A total of seventy-five persons attended this summer school. It was the first such effort to provide a program of training in churchmanship for laymen as well as ministers in the Free Will Baptist denomination in North Carolina.

In his report to the State Convention in 1925, W. B. Everett, financial agent for the college, brought news of the progress being

made on the new administration building. Since the foundation was laid in 1921, work had been interrupted time and again, mainly because of a lack of funds. Now \$20,000 had been borrowed to complete the work on the exterior and roof of the building and it was estimated that \$50,000 would be needed to finish the interior. It was difficult to obtain the amount needed in contributions, partly because many Free Will Baptists did not yet see the need for a college. Even some of the ministers were indifferent toward the success of this undertaking as shown by the fact that they failed to lead their congregations in supporting the campaign for funds.

During the time Mr. Everett served as financial agent he raised approximately \$60,000 for the college. Almost every week he reported on his activities in the *Baptist*, pleading earnestly for the support of this effort. After serving almost five years as financial agent, he requested to be relieved of his duties and the board agreed to his request in their annual meeting on May 28, 1926. Probably no other person had worked so hard and so faithfully to help build the facilities needed to launch a college program for the denomination. He traveled many miles across the state as well as outside North Carolina soliciting support for this cause. Although he might have been discouraged by the results in the early stages of the campaign, he never seemed to lose his enthusiasm for it. A small tribute was made to him when his friends decided to contribute six hundred dollars toward furnishing the large dining room in the new building as a memorial to him. (Today a conference room in the Moye Library at Mount Olive College is dedicated to the memory of this man.)

In the summer of 1925, the board decided to begin offering the first year of college while continuing to offer a four-year high school curriculum. The seminary facilities were to be used until the building on the new campus was completed. These plans were announced in the *Baptist* and prospective students were encouraged to enroll at the seminary with the understanding that they would be able to begin regular college studies there upon completion of high school. The enrollment that year was small, but the faculty

carried on their work, sustained by the hope that they would soon be occupying the new building on the east side of town. R. B. Spencer had been chosen by the board as the new president of the institution and under his able leadership the plans for developing a college were finally being carried out.

It occurred to someone that a new college needed a new name. Therefore, in January 1926 an official announcement was made in the *Baptist* and area newspapers that the college would be given a new name and the public was invited to send in suggestions to the board.

By February 10, the final date for submitting names, there were ninety suggestions from which to choose. The board met and after a lengthy discussion and the elimination of several possible choices, the name *Eureka* was chosen by a unanimous vote of the board and this became the official name of the college.

On September 8, 1926, Eureka College opened for the 1926-27 academic year. Final work on the administrative building was still in progress, but a sufficient number of classrooms had been completed and equipped for use so that the College could operate on the new campus. A suitable front had not been built to give the structure a finished appearance; therefore, an effort was made at the annual session of the State Convention to raise \$1,500 to finance the construction of this feature of the building.

A mass meeting and picnic was held on the new campus on September 10 to celebrate the opening of the school year and to generate support for the college campaign. Several hundred people attended and listened to speeches urging them to contribute so that work on the new building might be completed before the end of the year. The names of those who contributed were entered on an honor roll which appeared each week in the *Baptist*.

A special edition of the *Baptist*, published on December 15, 1926, was largely devoted to information about Eureka College. It included a historical sketch by President R. B. Spencer which described the founding and development of Ayden Seminary, followed by an account of the beginning of the college. Since the education of ministers was an important consideration in the

establishment of the college, an article outlining the curriculum in the Bible department was included. It was evident that such schools as Moody Bible Institute, where L. R. Ennis, dean of the department, had studied provided a strong influence in shaping the offerings in this department. President Spencer also contributed an article on the aim and the future prospects of the college and those whom it served. L. E. Ballard gave a brief résumé of the faculty which was followed by an interview with George W. Prescott concerning patrons in and around Ayden who had made great sacrifices for the school. The people of Ayden and members of the Ayden Free Will Baptist Church were among the most loyal supporters of the College. In this same issue a list of those who had given memorial gifts to finish each of the rooms in the new building was published. The amount of these gifts ranged from one hundred to five hundred dollars. There were also various photographs of men who had played an important role in the founding and support of the institution as well as members of the current faculty and student body . Finally, there were testimonials from various alumni representing conferences which sponsored the school. Altogether it was an upbeat issue aimed at winning the support of every loyal Free Will Baptist for this educational endeavor.

Despite the enthusiasm of the friends of the college during this first year on the new campus there was not a record enrollment which would help to ensure its success. The number of students enrolled at the beginning of the 1926-27 school year was less than fifty in all departments, including the high school. There were not enough students for a sophomore class, so that those who had taken the freshmen courses on the seminary campus the previous year had to transfer to other colleges. President Spencer appealed to readers of the *Baptist* to enroll their children at the college and thus give the institution a chance to prove its value to everyone. In order to increase the number of books in the library as well as to provide scholarship aid to prospective students, young people were encouraged to gather as many as fifty books in various subject areas and send them to the college. In return they would

receive a scholarship valued at seventy-five dollars toward their expenses at Eureka College.

When the administration building was finally completed, it was an attractive and commodious facility with an estimated value of \$100,000. Arrangements were made for women students to be housed on the third floor of this building. Later, a dormitory for men was constructed in 1927. There were tennis courts on the new campus and space for an athletic field which provided opportunity for the physical development of students.

President Spencer stated at the 1927 session of the State Convention that the college could take care of an enrollment of 200 students with the present facilities; however, far less than that number had matriculated at the beginning of the 1927-28 school year. An earlier announcement in the *Baptist* had stated that the curricula for the first two years of college would be offered in music, Bible, mathematics, science, languages, and business. In addition, a state-approved high school curriculum was being offered. Tuition was five dollars per month for high school students and six dollars for college students. There was an additional charge of seventy-five cents per month for students in music. In the past, the seminary had been able to attract a much larger enrollment of secondary students. Now high school students were more likely to opt for the public schools and not enough were making plans for college to assure that enrollment at Eureka would fulfill the expectations of its founders. The administration had recruited a faculty which seemed to be well qualified, but without adequate numbers of students it would be impossible to retain them. Income from tuition and gift support was not equal to the costs of operation; hence, the school could not balance the budget for the 1927-28 school year.

The indebtedness against Eureka had by this time become a serious problem, threatening the very continuation of the educational program. In addition to the amount owed on the current budget for operations, there was still a large debt for the construction of new buildings and equipment. The total amount of indebtedness, including principal and interest, as reported to the

State Convention in September 1928 was \$67,966.73. The fact that the bonds which had been sold in 1918-19 would soon have to be redeemed was causing some concern among members of the board and friends of the college. There was also disappointment in the fact that enrollment at the college had fallen short of the expectations of everyone. It seems that Free Will Baptists had not yet awakened to the importance of college education, both for the denomination and for individual students. At this point, some were ready to declare that the college had failed. There were those who thought this had happened because the college had tried to offer a program of general education in addition to the curriculum in the Bible department which was designed primarily to provide training for ministers. What the denomination needed, they felt, was a Bible School which would have as its sole purpose the preparation of ministers. The fact that L. R. Ennis, dean of the Bible department, was asked to serve as head of the institution when it opened in September 1928 and that the college would now place even more emphasis on the education of ministers suggests that the board was prepared to abandon the idea of developing a broad-based program to meet the educational needs of all Free Will Baptists as well as those outside the denomination.

A resolution adopted at the 1928 session of the State Convention called for a budget of \$35,000 to be raised for the college by January 1, 1929, and for each pastor to be required to spend not less than one week without compensation in soliciting funds for this purpose. One of those who accepted this charge without complaint was Elder J. C. Griffin, who reported what these "six days" had meant to him in the December 19 issue of the *Baptist*. In this experience he found that there were some people who were greatly interested in this cause and some who were not. The latter, he said, are not to blame for their lack of vision. "I am convinced more than ever that if this work fails that the blame falls on the ministers of our church," he declared. In the same issue, there was an appeal by L. R. Ennis that Free Will Baptists send a gift for Eureka College this Christmas in order to help raise the amount needed to pay accounts outstanding against the institution.

On the front cover of this same issue there was a picture of the administration building and a suggestion that gifts of five dollars from each minister and ten dollars from each Sunday school, as well as special gifts from all friends, would make this a merry Christmas for Eureka.

Many friends of the college among Free Will Baptists as well as outside the denomination felt that a great deal was at stake in the effort to save the college from bankruptcy. In their judgment the honor of the denomination, even possibly its survival, was bound up with this cause. To abandon the college in this time of urgent crisis would be a blow from which the denomination might not recover. To save it would require great sacrifices on the part of many people at a time when they could least afford to give large sums of money.

Following the State Convention in 1928, a letter was sent to each clerk and pastor stating the amounts apportioned to each church and asking the pastor to be responsible for raising the quota from his churches to meet the goal of \$35,000. Several churches in the Ayden area soon responded with either full or partial payments of their quotas. Those who opposed the campaign or who were indifferent did not respond. In January 1929 L. R. Ennis was still urging ministers who read the *Baptist* "to conform speedily and wholeheartedly to the resolution adopted at the last session of the State convention." According to his statement, only about fifteen ministers had done so. Because of the lack of funds, the operation of the high school department was suspended indefinitely at the beginning of the year. Ennis himself was providing instruction in the Bible department at no cost to the school in order that all funds contributed to the campaign could be applied to the school's debt. A total of \$6,000 was received between September and January, far short of the amount needed to make the institution solvent. There were frequent appeals in the *Baptist* from both men and women during the next several months, calling on Free Will Baptists to act now to save the college, but all such efforts failed to keep the doors of the college open.

A negative factor which hindered the success of this campaign

was the fact that Free Will Baptists had never before this decade been called upon to give large sums of money toward any cause; nor had they been taught to give systematically to the church for local needs or for denominational enterprises. Few churches were supporting full-time pastors and the great majority were giving only nominal amounts to the college, to the orphanage, or to other causes. One reason for this was the lack of stewardship training, a defect for which the ministry and the leadership of the denomination must be held responsible. Once the State Convention had begun to develop programs which required large sums of money, there was not a system in place for garnering that kind of support.

When the State Convention met in 1929, the chairman of the Board of Trustees of Eureka College reported that the college was not operating and that they had "thrust the indebtedness upon the endorsers of the Long Term Loan." (Pilot Life Insurance Company had made a loan of \$40,000 to the college in 1926 to complete construction on the administration building.) When asked if the Convention wanted the property, the body then voted to stand behind the endorsers of the loan and to pay off all outstanding obligations, thereby retaining ownership of the college property for the denomination. A committee appointed to devise a plan for accomplishing this recommended a two-stage campaign to raise \$50,000, half of this amount by April 1, 1930, and the remainder during the following year.

At a meeting of the ministers in Goldsboro on October 15, 1929, it was decided that the Executive Committee of the State Convention should direct the campaign with the help of committees representing each of the four conferences which sponsored the college—the Central, Eastern, Western, and Cape Fear conferences. Each church would be asked to give a definite amount toward the goal for the first phase of the campaign. For the first time, women were to be more actively involved in the effort to raise funds through the appointment of a lady director, who would in turn designate an auxiliary director in each of the four conferences. The women of each church were asked to raise one-third of their church quota.

Since there was no longer an educational program being offered at Eureka and limited use was being made of the facilities there, the Executive Committee of the college board met on February 6, 1930, and decided to "offer the property free of debt to the North Carolina State Convention to be used as the home of the Free Will Baptist Orphanage and a Bible School." This offer was presented to the Executive Committee of the Convention on February 11. A committee of three was chosen to investigate the merits of such as offer and to present their findings at a special session of the Convention on April 2, 1930, at the Kinston Free Will Baptist Church. When the delegates gathered in Kinston, they found it necessary to seek larger accommodations. Permission was granted to meet at the Gordon Street Christian Church. When the committee had made the report of its findings, showing the assets and the advantages of each location for the Orphanage (the present location at Middlesex or the proposed offer of the college at Ayden), there was a heated discussion of the matter by the ministers and delegates. The vote was conducted by conferences, with the strongest opposition registered by the Western Conference. The final tally revealed that 116 voted to accept the offer and 171 voted against it. The outcome of this proposal may have made it even more difficult for the college to obtain the support needed to meet the goals of the campaign to pay off the indebtedness.

By now the nation was suffering from an economic depression and this was evident in the denominational meetings. When the State Convention met in September 1930, there was little that could be done to help the college except urge a continuation of the campaign for funds and pledge to stand behind the signers of the long term loan. In spite of the enthusiasm shown by friends of the college at this session, no real steps were taken to remedy the problem.

The following year a tragedy occurred which had irreparable consequences. The main building of Eureka College was completely destroyed by fire. It happened while the Central Conference was in session at Free Union Church, Greene County, on

Wednesday night, November 4, 1931. The sad news reached the ministers and delegates on the following day. C. K. Dunn, manager of the *Baptist*, wrote in an editorial, "This is the greatest and most distinct loss that our people have sustained in our history. We have been doing some educational work for more than thirty years and now this burn has practically destroyed everything that has been done in a material way, in these many years." He recognized the difficulty that Free Will Baptists would have in rebuilding after such a loss, but he did not hesitate to express his conviction that it could be done by a people willing to make sacrifices.

The Ayden Free Will Baptist Church was deprived of a meeting place for worship by the fire which destroyed the administration building, along with fixtures and furniture being used by the church as well as church records. The members of this church had given liberally to the development program of the college, having sold their property when the college moved to its new location, and had been among its most loyal supporters. Now they had suffered a double loss—the hope that the college would be reopened in the near future and a place for the congregation to meet and carry on its activities.

Fortunately, there was some insurance coverage on the building, enough to cover most of the indebtedness against it, so that the signers of the long term loan would not have to sustain the loss. But the greatest damage was the sense of failure felt by those who had labored so hard to develop the college, only to see their dreams partially realized and then reduced to ashes. Such dreams do not die easily if they arise out of the genuine needs and aspirations of a people who feel that they have a purpose to fulfill. The next generation of Free Will Baptists were to see their dreams become a reality in the founding of Mount Olive College.

Principals or Superintendents of Ayden Seminary

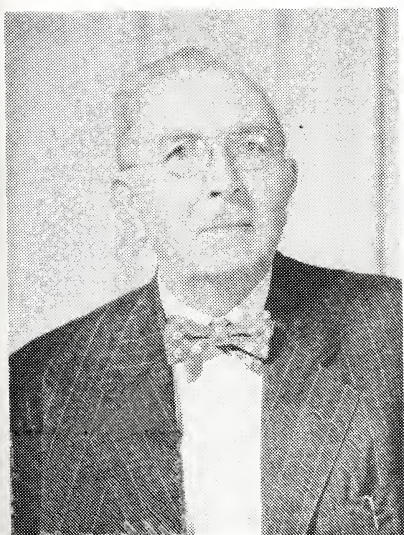
J. E. B. Davis—1898

Thomas E. Peden—1898-1910

J. E. Sawyer—1910-1920
A. R. Flowers—1921-22
R. B. Lee—1922-1924
C. E. Prescott—1924-1925

Presidents of Eureka College

R. B. Spencer—1925-1928
L. R. Ennis—1928-1929



Top: Rev. & Mrs. J. C. Moye; J. C. Griffin
and W. Burkette Raper

Bottom: J. W. Alford; Katie Sawyer Jackson

Chapter XII

The Formation of the National Association

When the North Carolina Convention held its annual session in September 1930, the effects of the "great depression" were already being felt, as perhaps the smallest number of delegates and ministers assembled at White Oak Church, Bladen County, that had attended any session since the first one in 1913. There was evidence also of a spiritual depression in view of the fact that the college had ceased to operate and a special session of the Convention in April of that year had rejected an offer to move the Orphanage to Ayden so that the facilities there could be used more effectively. The reports of the various boards at this session reflect the depressed condition of the denomination. The Mission Board, for example, was "not functioning." The Church Extension Board made a rather inconclusive report, stating that they did have a fund in a bank at New Bern which probably could not be drawn upon since the banks in that city had failed. The College Board was still struggling with the debt which had not been paid. A special committee appointed at this session recommended the continuation of the college campaign and the appointment of still another committee to prepare a concise statement of the amount of indebtedness and the terms of liquidating the debt. This would then be presented to the Executive Committee of the Convention, it being understood that the Convention was willing to stand behind the signers of the long term loan of \$40,000 made to the college by Pilot Life Insurance Company in 1926.

The report of the Orphanage Board at this session revealed that there were more applications than the Home could possibly admit due to space limitations as well as the anticipated decline in gifts from churches and individuals on account of the depression. The Orphanage was still making payments on the loan for capital improvements at the rate of \$1,000 each year plus interest. There were eighty-five children at the Home and the superintendent expressed the fear that unless more gifts were forthcoming to meet

current expenses that some suppliers would stop sending needed items to the Orphanage. Already it was necessary, he said, to borrow money for current operations.

Only one minister and only one church was represented by delegate from the Central Conference at this session of the Convention while two churches did represent by letter. This situation grew out of a controversy between the president of the Convention and Rev. J. C. Moyer, a leading minister in the Central Conference. Moyer was offended by a remark made by the president of the Convention at the 1929 session. This remark was not on record but it was an implied charge of mismanagement on the part of those connected with Eureka College. Since Moyer was chairman of the College Board, he took issue with the president and the result of this controversy was a virtual boycott of the Convention by the churches of the Central Conference in 1930 and 1931. It was not until a meeting between the executive committees of the Central Conference and the Convention in Snow Hill, North Carolina, on August 17, 1932, that the parties to this controversy tried to reconcile their differences. The Central Conference actually set the conditions for its re-entry into the Convention and these conditions, which included a public acknowledgement of improper conduct on the part of the president of the Convention in session, were apparently agreed upon. When the Convention met in September 1932, there were ten ministers from the Central Conference who attended, including R. F. Pittman and J. C. Moyer, who were the moderator and vice-moderator of the conference. Then in November at the annual session of the Central Conference the minutes of the meeting held at Snow Hill in August for the purpose of reconciling the persons involved in the controversy were read but no action was taken concerning the re-entry of the conference into the Convention. J. C. Moyer was elected as moderator of the conference at that session. The following year, when a motion was adopted to re-enter the Convention, Moyer resigned as moderator and his resignation was accepted. D. W. Alexander, the vice-moderator, was asked to fill his unexpired term. A controversy which had erupted on account

of an unsubstantiated remark made at the 1929 session of the Convention was not finally resolved in the Central Conference until four years later. Because of its location in the Central Conference, ministers and churches of that conference were among the college's most loyal supporters. Some of them were deeply disturbed by public comments of a derogatory nature directed toward those responsible for the management of the college. Meanwhile the main building of the college had been destroyed by fire on the night of November 4, 1931. This tragic loss only added to ill feelings generated by the controversy.

The desire for some kind of institution for the training of ministers was still alive despite the closing of Eureka College and the loss of its main building by fire. A proposal to open a Bible School, using the dormitory building on the campus, was made at the Central Conference in 1931. A committee was appointed to study this matter. They met on November 25, 1931, elected R. F. Pittman as chairman and D. W. Alexander as secretary, and each member was asked to solicit funds for the project with an immediate goal of \$2,000. Very little progress was made on this project for reasons that would seem obvious. Church members were having difficulty meeting their personal obligations as well as providing for the support of the church and its benevolent causes. They were less willing at this time to give to any new undertaking. At the 1932 session of the Convention R. F. Pittman spoke in behalf of the proposed Bible School and of his desire that the denomination should retain control of the property on which the college had been located. There was evidently little interest in this proposal, for no action was taken by the Convention in response to it.

A new group of churches, the Buncombe County Association, was represented for the first time at the 1931 session of the Convention. It was the result of leadership provided by R. V. (Bob) Self and Loy E. Ballard in that area of North Carolina. Ballard was now living in the Asheville area and had begun the publication of *The Free Will Baptist Messenger* as a means of promoting the growth of the denomination in western North

Carolina as well as urging support for the institutions and programs of the Convention. A native of this region, he had attended the seminary at Ayden and for several years had labored among Free Will Baptists in eastern North Carolina. Willet L. Moretz of Swannanoa, who was serving as secretary of the Mission Board, was also providing leadership in that area of the state.

The Great Depression of the 1930's

The impact of the "great depression" was very much on the minds of people during the early 1930's. There were many references to the effects of it in the pages of the *Baptist*. The subscription price to receive the *Baptist* for one year was reduced to one dollar so that subscribers would renew. To encourage the enlistment of more subscribers "The Honor Roll" began to appear each week, listing the names of those who had obtained ten or more subscriptions. For several years this list continued to appear, indicating the success of this method of gaining and holding subscribers to the magazine. Now and then someone would contribute a brief article which called attention to the "hard times," citing instances of how the courageous and hard-working were coping with the depression. One contributor offered the view that the depression was but the divine judgment upon a people who had forsaken their God. Another article told of a man who gave one dollar to the church each week out of his wages and still was able to build a house in the midst of these difficult times. (One dollar per day was considered good wages at this time.) L. E. Ballard raised this question in one of his contributions to the *Baptist*: "Is your church doing any welfare work?" He added this comment: "I think it is a pity that in so many communities all the work of caring for the hungry and needy is left to purely commercial or civic organizations.... Let our churches adopt the following resolution: 'No member of our congregation shall have to apply to organized charity until we all have sacrificed until it hurts.'" Because we lack any statistics on such matters, we do not know the kinds of response made by local Free Will Baptist churches to

the basic needs of people living in their communities.

It is clear that North Carolina had its share of people in need during the depression. The Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA), one of President Roosevelt's New Deal Programs, reported that from August 8, 1933, to December 5, 1935, 17,175 North Carolinians, 11.8 percent of the population, received aid from the federal government in the form of \$39,898,194, and an additional \$12,155,000 in aid from the Public Works Administration (PWA).¹ At no time prior to this period had the federal government provided this type of assistance to so many people. In addition, there were other kinds of aid to farmers who were in danger of losing their lands or who needed money to finance their crops.

During the 1930's one cause which did arouse the sympathies of many Free Will Baptists was the Orphanage at Middlesex, which had taken in more children because of the impact of the depression. While several applications were processed each year, there were some who were dismissed either because they had a relative who could take care of their needs or because they had completed high school. Every medium available to the superintendent and the board was used to keep before Free Will Baptists the needs of these children at the Orphanage. If anyone could not send money, he was encouraged to bring food or clothing. Such items were provided by many churches and taken to the Home so that the physical needs of the children could be met.

Zion Bible School

A new development in education for ministers among Free Will Baptists which deserves comment is the establishment of Zion Bible School near Blakely, Georgia. Located in the southwest corner of the state, it could attract students in the Tri-state region (Georgia, Alabama, and Florida) who wished to receive a minimum of preparation for the ministry. The idea for such a school was conceived by Rev. T. B. Mellette, a native of South Carolina, who had earlier studied at Ayden Seminary and was now a leading

Free Will Baptist minister in South Georgia. Recognizing the great need of ministerial education in that area, he proposed to open a school at Zion Free Will Baptist Church and to seek support for it among the churches of the Tri-state region as well as in the General Conference of Free Will Baptists. The first group of students began their studies on September 9, 1930. Most of these students had not completed high school but some of them later returned to high school and earned college degrees.²

Although the Education Committee at the 1930 session of the General Conference called for a united front in support of Eureka College in order to liquidate its indebtedness, there was also a resolution passed at this session calling attention to the opening of Zion Bible School and asking Free Will Baptists in the Tri-state area to give it their support and the General Conference to endorse it. Later there were several appeals submitted to the *Baptist* by friends of the school, asking for contributions. Likewise, news items from church gatherings in that region often mentioned the school and its needs. At the 1931 session of the General Conference the report of the Education Committee endorsed both Eureka College, which had closed, and Zion Bible School. The report also noted that Zion had completed its first session "with four bright, intelligent young men studying to show themselves approved" The conference also adopted a proposal that the Education Committee be replaced by a Board of Education, charged with the task of surveying the educational needs and possibilities for the denomination and reporting its findings and recommendations at the 1932 session of the General Conference, "together with an educational program to be conducted by the Conference."

In addition to serving as Field Secretary of the General Conference, J. L. Welch was elected to the post of Educational Secretary in 1932. Aware of the desire on the part of some ministers and delegates to establish an educational institution that would serve the entire denomination, he recommended in his report to the General Conference in 1933 "That the question of a centralized educational institution be made contingent upon the

merging of the Co-operative General Association and the General Conference into one national body." Each of these organizations had attempted to establish a college—Tecumseh College and Eureka College—and both had met with failure. The Main Building for each institution had been destroyed by fire, Tecumseh in 1927 and Eureka in 1931. Zion Bible School was the only school operating in 1932 and its future did not seem promising. The school moved to Dothan, Alabama, in 1936 where property was obtained. Later this property was sold and the proceeds were given to the Free Will Baptist Bible College which was established in Nashville, Tennessee.³

Smithfield Bible School

In February 1933 the Executive Committee of the North Carolina Convention became involved in a new proposal to open a Bible School at Smithfield, North Carolina. The Smithfield Free Will Baptist Church was facing a financial crisis which prompted them to offer the church property to the Convention with these provisions: that it be used as a Bible School, that the Convention assume the mortgage on the property (\$4,642.50), and that the church be allowed to continue using the facility for regular church services. The Executive Committee, after a study of this offer, recommended its acceptance by the Convention at its 1933 session. The Convention voted its approval and a deed to the property was given to the recording secretary. Arrangements had been made to pay off the mortgage on the property over a period of twelve years.

A resolution was passed at this session to elect a budget committee who would prepare and submit a budget to the Convention for the financial support of the denominational enterprises. Apparently the denominational agencies did not include budgets in their annual reports. In their report the budget committee gave the following amounts: Orphanage—\$15,000; Bible School—\$1,200; Home and Foreign Missions—\$500; Church Extension Work—\$500. These figures reflect the depressed conditions

affecting the stewardship of the churches in support of the denominational causes during this period.

Nevertheless, at this session in 1933 there was evidence of more unity and harmony than at previous sessions. The bitterness and rancor that had surfaced at previous sessions was now being set aside as these Free Will Baptists tried to renew their efforts toward the common goal of magnifying Christ through their worship and service to others.

When the Convention met in 1934, an important item on the agenda was the matter of opening the Bible School at Smithfield. Rev. Jesse P. Barrow, a native of Greene County, then residing in Chicago, Illinois, was asked to make a presentation concerning his assuming responsibility for leading in the opening of a school at Smithfield, using the facilities which had been acquired by the Convention in 1933. Later in the session it was decided that the school should be opened at the discretion of Mr. Barrow and the Board of Trustees. The Board decided to begin operation on September 20, 1934. It was estimated that the cost of operating the school, including the payment of \$50 per month on the building loan, would be about \$150 per month. W. H. Lancaster was the first student to enroll. The editor of the *Baptist* and others appealed to the churches to support this undertaking and to put aside those negative feelings that had hindered the educational programs of the past. The principal and teacher, Jesse Barrow, likewise sent regular news items to the *Baptist*, soliciting students as well as funds needed to keep the school from closing. He also visited as many conferences, union meetings, and local churches as possible in the interest of the school. In his contacts with Free Will Baptists he emphasized the importance of Bible training as preparation for the ministry with less attention to other theological disciplines.

When a report was made to the Convention in 1935 on the progress of the Smithfield Bible School, it was revealed that churches and individuals were not giving the support needed to continue this program. Payments on the loan for the church property, which the Convention had assumed in 1933, were in

arrears and likewise the salary of Mr. Barrow. Another program had become victim to the depressed conditions of the time.

Movement Toward Union

Meanwhile, as the entire nation was experiencing the full impact of the "great depression," a movement was underway to bring together the General Conference of Free Will Baptists and the Co-operative General Association of Freewill Baptists. It began in 1931 when Rev. C. B. Thompson, a "corresponding delegate" from the Texas State Convention was seated at the annual session of the General Conference. An invitation was extended to the conference to hold its next session at the Bryan Free Will Baptist Church, Bryan, Texas. This invitation was accepted and the conference voted to meet at the Bryan Church in 1932. Present at the session in Bryan were a number of brethren from the Co-operative Association who were seated as fraternal delegates. The Credentials Committee noted that these men, as well as members of the General Conference, were interested in bringing about a merger of the two organizations. Therefore, they recommended that a committee be appointed to work with the Executive Committee of the Co-operative Association in devising a satisfactory basis for such a merger and that they report back to the General Conference in 1933.

At the 1933 session of the conference, which convened at the East Nashville Church, Nashville, Tennessee, the Joint Committee which had been asked to work out a basis for merger of the two organizations reported as follows:

We agree to accept the Articles of Faith of the 1901 Treatise, also the church covenant contained in the same treatise, together with all the forms and usages set forth in the same, with such amendments as may be made and approved by the body when perfected into one organization.

We heartily agree to the merging of the General Confer-

ence and Co-operative General Association into one body, and we urge that steps be taken immediately for the final consummation of such a union.⁴

J. W. Alford signed for the General Conference and B. F. Brown for the Co-operative Association. It should be pointed out that the Treatise referred to in this report was a Treatise of the Northern Freewill Baptists prior to their merger with the Northern Baptists. Some of the "forms and usages" in that document would need to be harmonized with the Discipline which had been used by the larger conferences in North Carolina, with minor revisions, for more than a century and had been adopted by the North Carolina Convention. The section on church polity in the 1901 Treatise was quite different from the "forms and usages" recognized by most Free Will Baptists in the South in the 1930's. The fact that Free Will Baptists in North Carolina had a different tradition of faith and practice as well as church government from that of Northern Freewill Baptists meant that more effort was required to resolve these differences if problems were to be avoided in the future. The fact that there was no clear resolution of these differences at the "grass roots level" when the merger was being considered would contribute to the misunderstanding and division that occurred a generation later. Perhaps because of an awareness of the difficulties these differences might present in the efforts to consummate a merger of the two organizations, a Treatise Committee was appointed to prepare a document that would be acceptable to both groups. The record suggests that there was very little consultation and discussion with large numbers of people in leadership positions throughout the denomination. It was assumed that the Treatise Committee could resolve these differences so that no roadblocks to union would be thrown up at the last minute. Thus when the committee was called upon to make its report at the first session of the National Association on November 7, 1935, Rev. Lizzie McAdams made a motion that the report be adopted without being read. The motion was carried unanimously! Later the report was read to the body but only after it had been

adopted.

While the Co-operative Association was in session at Denison, Texas, in November 1934, the Joint Committee of the two organizations submitted a report which read in part:

In addition to the terms agreed upon in Nashville, Tennessee, on June 15, 1933, we ... agree to unite the above named bodies in one national body to be known as the National Association of Free Will Baptists, with the understanding that the two bodies thus united continue to operate under their present organization without becoming in any way responsible for each other's present obligations, and with the understanding that neither of the two bodies shall in any way have jurisdiction over the other, but at the same time they are to continue their work as parts of the national body.⁵

It was agreed that the National Association would hold its meetings triennially and that its two constituent bodies would meet annually. The National Association was to hold its first meeting at the East Nashville Church, beginning on Tuesday night after the first Sunday in November, 1935. This plan, which gave to each of the two organizations a certain autonomy and a continuing existence, did not satisfy those who favored a strong national organization at the expense of regional bodies. The practical reasons that drew them together, which included a desire for greater recognition and prestige and more efficient programs of education and missions, became the basis for reasoning that only one organization meeting annually could achieve these goals more effectively. Thus the National Association held its second triennial session in 1938, but from that year forward it began to hold annual meetings and the Eastern and Western Associations, as they were then called, ceased to operate altogether.

The General Conference continued to hold annual meetings until 1938. At these meetings the business of the conference was conducted as usual with reports from the various boards and

committees. In 1930 the General Conference had voted to discontinue working through a board of missions and instead elect a General Secretary of foreign missions. Rev. I. J. Blackwelder served in this capacity. Each state organization was asked to appoint a secretary who would cooperate with the General Secretary in raising funds for this cause. Between November 1931 and June 1935 contributions totaling \$450 were received and sent to Ceylon and India General Mission and designated for Mr. R. Paul, a native worker.

At its annual meeting in 1935, held at Black Jack Church in Pitt County, North Carolina, the General Conference commissioned its first missionary, Miss Laura Belle Barnard of Glennville, Georgia. She was to go to India where she would work under the auspices of the International Union Mission. Upon her arrival she was stationed in Kotagiri, South India. This action was endorsed by the National Association of Free Will Baptists at its first meeting in 1935, but the General Conference provided most of Miss Barnard's support until it ceased to operate in 1938. In 1936 the General Conference also endorsed Rev. and Mrs. Thomas E. Willey for work in South America, pledging \$1,500 for their support. The Willeys went to Panama instead, where they continued to receive support from Free Will Baptists through gifts sent to the Secretary for Foreign Missions of the General Conference until the National Association could assume responsibility for their support.

After the formation of the National Association in November 1935 the General Conference adopted a new constitution at its 1936 session. Its name was changed to "Eastern General Association" and its stated purpose was now "to cooperate with the National Association in its efforts to elicit, combine, and direct the energies of the Free Will Baptist Church for the promotion of home and foreign missions, etc." As early as the first session of the National Association efforts were made to bring the work of missions, education, leagues, woman's auxiliaries and Sunday schools under the umbrella of the national organization.

The Founding of Free Will Baptist Bible College

One of the primary reasons why the Eastern General Conference and the Western Co-operative Association were willing to put aside their differences and work toward a merger of the two groups was the desire to establish a viable educational institution that would serve the needs of both constituencies. Since the training of ministers was thought to be the most pressing need at the time, the leadership in both groups were persuaded that a Bible School would provide the type of education best suited for the preparation of ministers. The fact that the Bible school movement, which had begun earlier in this century, provided a shortcut to the traditional college and seminary education available in larger, more established denominations was appealing to some. In addition, some ministers felt that a denominational Bible school would be a bulwark against Free Will Baptist students being exposed to different views and different life styles that might be at odds with what they had previously been taught. Others felt that ministers needed only to be well versed in the Scriptures and related studies in order to be effective pastors, evangelists, and missionaries. It is doubtful that these ideas about the kind of education needed by the denomination were shared by the majority of Free Will Baptists. Those who had attended college at all, and they were a small minority at that time, were more likely to have enrolled at a church-related liberal arts college or a state supported institution. Because real opportunities for higher education were quite limited in rural areas where Free Will Baptists generally lived, many would have been uninformed as to the kind of education that would best serve the needs of the denomination.

As early as 1934 the General Conference elected a board of education and charged them to locate a suitable site for a college that would serve the denomination. This assignment was somewhat premature in view of the fact that no resources were available to the board to begin a college. Nevertheless, in its report the following year the board recommended that Nashville, Tennessee, be chosen for the location of a Bible college. This decision was

approved by a joint board representing the two constituent bodies of the National Association and the task of raising funds and creating a climate favorable to such an undertaking was begun. During the 1930's this would not be easy to accomplish due to the continuing effects of the "great depression."

An interesting development occurred in 1937 when the Board of Education met at Weaverville, North Carolina, on October 7, and there agreed to make an offer to buy the property of Weaver-ville College, which was being sold by the Western North Carolina Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Like many other colleges throughout the nation during the depression years, it had been closed. The offer made to the Methodist Conference was later rejected because the college trustees preferred to sell the property in a cash transaction rather than allow the buyer to assume a note on the property to be paid off over a period of years. This would have required the Board to find a lender who would be willing to put up a large sum with no security other than the property itself. The Board had to seek other alternatives.

The difficulty of raising money to open a college may be seen by the fact that J. R. Davidson, treasurer of the board, reported having received only \$42.93 by September 17, 1938. Gradually additional funds were raised though not enough to launch a college program. The Board of Education decided to sponsor a series of biblical institutes at various locations to provide minimal instruction for pastors and Christian workers. It was felt that this would help to create interest and support for the establishment of a centrally located school. Finally, in 1941 the National Association set up a Board of Trustees with authority to purchase property and to make an initial payment of as much as \$15,000. Arrangements were made to purchase a building located on property at 3609 Richland Avenue in Nashville, Tennessee. In 1942 L. C. Johnson was appointed as President and J. R. Davidson as Business Manager and Treasurer of the proposed school. The school opened in September 1942 with an enrollment of nine students. From the beginning the school developed a philosophy, molded by its first president who was a graduate of Bob Jones College (later

University).

Bob Jones, Sr., founder of Bob Jones College, was a separatist Fundamentalist who was determined to maintain the most rigid code of conduct on his campus and to prevent any deviation from a militant fundamentalist position. The result was that many ministerial graduates of that institution were bent on perpetuating that same philosophy in churches and schools wherever they were called to serve as pastors and teachers.

In later years as new faculty and administrators were employed at Free Will Baptist Bible College with credentials from Bob Jones University and other similar institutions, it was inevitable that the kind of educational philosophy embraced by the personnel of the college would be modeled after that of its first president. William F. Davidson has written of Johnson and Free Will Baptist Bible College:

Without question, the school and its philosophy reflect the ministry and the thinking of L. C. Johnson. His long tenure allowed time for the molding and shaping of an educational program that has trained hundreds of young men and women for denominational service.⁶

This educational philosophy which was nurtured at Free Will Baptist Bible College would in time create an expectation in certain segments of the denomination that any other educational venture sponsored by Free Will Baptists must conform to this same philosophy. Any attempt to embrace a different philosophy would likely be met with harsh criticism and a defiant opposition.

Potential Sources of Conflict

Through its affiliation with the Eastern General Conference (Association) the North Carolina Convention was a part of the National Association beginning in 1935. Afterwards the constitution of the National Association was changed to provide for representation by states. In recognition of its affiliation with the

National Association the minutes of the Convention reveal that from 1936 until 1947 it was known as "the North Carolina State Association of Churches." Year after year it was well represented by both ministers and delegates in the annual meetings of the national body after the decision was made in 1938 to convene annually. North Carolina Free Will Baptists contributed to all of the programs of the National Association in proportion to the size of its membership, which was larger than that of any other state organization. Men and women from North Carolina who were chosen to serve on boards, commissions, and committees of the National Association gave unstintingly of their time and energy in helping to achieve the goals of these agencies so that the Free Will Baptist Church might develop into a mature denomination and thus be able to fulfill its purpose in the world.

For at least two decades Free Will Baptists across the nation were able to meet together annually to discuss their common concerns and to worship in a spirit of brotherhood. Although there were occasional personality conflicts and differences of opinion on the best way to accomplish the work of the denomination, on the whole there was a spirit of cooperation in the annual meetings of the National Association until the late 1950's. A noticeable degree of progress was being made in all phases of the denominational work—missions, education, Sunday schools, leagues, woman's auxiliaries, superannuation of ministers, and publications—all were showing gains in participation and financial support. In time a national headquarters was established which provided office space for the Executive Department and the staffs of the various boards. A monthly magazine, *Contact*, was launched to provide news of important events and activities, to promote the programs of the National Association, and to build loyalty to the denomination, especially its executive and administrative functionaries. In addition, each board had its own promotional organization, including staff visits to association meetings, letters to pastors and other local church officers, and an array of promotional materials for distribution. The machinery of each of these programs was gradually being developed and fine-tuned to achieve the maximum

results. After 1951 the annual meetings of the National Association were no longer held in the facilities of local churches but in rented auditoriums large enough to accommodate large numbers of people. Cities where these meetings were to be held were expected to have suitable hotel accommodations and restaurants for the large crowds, which consisted of more ministers and their wives than laypersons representing constituent bodies.

In spite of the apparent harmony which seemed to characterize the national meetings, there were factors at work in the background which were destined to introduce discord and conflict. One of these was the role of the Free Will Baptist Press at Ayden, North Carolina, which supplied literature for the Sunday schools, leagues, and woman's auxiliaries of the denomination. Because of its location and its history it came to be identified in the minds of many outside North Carolina with the Convention in that state, despite the fact that its weekly magazine had long been recognized as "the organ of the denomination" in the Eastern General Conference and the fact that it had carried news items and articles of interest to Free Will Baptists in every state where there were Free Will Baptist churches. Furthermore, the Press was organized as a non-profit stock company in which any Free Will Baptist church organization or individual could own stock whether they were located in North Carolina or not. But the fact that more stock had been purchased by church organizations in North Carolina than elsewhere before the National Association was organized led some to conclude that the Press was not a bonafide agency of the denomination because it was not owned and controlled by the National Association. This attitude developed over a period of time and it was easy to persuade younger minds, who were not familiar with the denomination's earlier history or who felt that they had no stake in the survival of the Free Will Baptist Press, to become advocates of this point of view.

Doctrinal differences sometimes contributed to a negative attitude toward the Free Will Baptist Press in certain quarters of the National Association. When the leaders of the two bodies that came together to form the National Association were working on

a basis for merging the two groups, they were aware of minor differences in doctrine which could cause problems in the future. There were, after all, different articles of faith that were recognized by the two groups and even in the Eastern General Conference there were slight variations in the doctrinal statements held by its various constituent bodies. These differences did not suddenly disappear simply because a joint committee representing the two groups decided to recommend the adoption of the 1901 Treatise of Northern Freewill Baptists as a basis of union. Since the *Free Will Baptist* frequently carried articles which dealt with doctrines of the church, there was the possibility that a writer who submitted such an article would interpret a given doctrine in a manner that seemed contrary to the beliefs of other Free Will Baptists. This article would then be criticized in a letter to the editor, who might also be faulted by other readers for having published the article. The editor usually refused to publish articles which he thought contained controversial matters, but he was not always wise enough to catch every statement to which objection might be raised. This same problem arose in regard to Sunday school literature, which dealt with interpretations of the Bible, as well as league quarterlies, that often provided explanations of church doctrines.

One could occasionally hear the statement in conversations among Free Will Baptists that this denomination held a doctrinal position as sound as any to be found. Unfortunately, there was not always agreement as to how those doctrines should be interpreted. Even more critical for the future of the denomination was the fact that in the 1950's there was an increasing mindset among certain younger men in the ministry who felt that because of the kind of training which they had received, they were the keepers and the guardians of orthodoxy. Any deviation from their theological position was likely to be attacked as liberal or as "modernist." In such an atmosphere the unity and harmony of the church was seriously threatened. Further treatment of these and other factors which led to conflict and division in the denomination will be given in Chapter XIV.



Top: Stephen A. Smith; Rev. & Mrs. David W. Hansley
Bottom: Alice E. Lupton; James A. Evans

Chapter XIII

Developments in the North Carolina Convention: 1935-1960

The North Carolina Convention and its affiliated conferences and associations continued to meet annually and to carry on the work which they had begun before the organization of the National Association. As indicated in the previous chapter, every effort was made to cooperate with other constituencies in the national body and to support the agencies and programs of the larger organization. But there were also needs and concerns within the state which had to be addressed. It is to these needs and concerns that we now turn our attention.

Earlier it was noted that due to the influence of the Temperance Movement in the late nineteenth century the mood of evangelical Christians in America shifted to a position of total abstinence on the use of alcoholic beverages. State after state adopted prohibition laws or amended their constitutions to provide for the prohibition of the production and sale of beverage alcohol. Finally the Eighteenth Amendment was added to the Federal Constitution, thus making prohibition the law of the entire nation. During the 1920's there was growing opposition to national prohibition with the result that in December 1933 the Eighteenth Amendment was repealed by the ratification of the Twenty-third Amendment.

Afterwards the general Assembly of North Carolina enacted local option laws which allowed the counties in the state to decide by vote of the citizens in these counties whether or not they would permit the establishment of Alcoholic Beverage Control stores. The Temperance Committee report at the State Convention in 1935 took note of this action by the General Assembly and registered its opposition to such legislation, urging Free Will Baptists to oppose the election of anyone to public office who "favors the so-called ABC stores or the sale of liquor in any way whatever that tends to do away with our state prohibition laws." It was a disappointment to many Free Will Baptists that the nation had rejected prohibition

as a means of controlling the manufacture and sale of beverage alcohol. While most North Carolinians probably had not supported repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment, the opportunity for local governments to provide for the sale of alcohol had now been established by action of the General Assembly. For several years those counties in which citizens opposed to the sale of alcohol were able to exert strong influence remained "dry", but eventually the "wet" forces were able to win a referendum in most of these localities on the issue of ABC stores. In these elections Free Will Baptist churches usually took a stand in opposition to the ABC system. The understanding that temperance now meant total abstinence had become the rule among Free Will Baptists in North Carolina in contrast to an earlier period when only "drinking to excess" was officially condemned.

In 1936 the Executive Board of the Convention approved a resolution to appoint a committee which was charged with finding ways and means of procuring land to be used for a campground. On this land they proposed to erect a tabernacle large enough to accommodate annual meetings of the Convention. It would also be used for a variety of purposes, including young peoples' meetings, woman's auxiliary conventions, and other gatherings. The idea was also conceived that facilities for the care of elderly and disabled ministers should be included in the development plans. The following year a tract of twenty acres was given to the Convention to be used for this purpose by Mr. Ben Wallace of Snow Hill Church in Duplin County. The deed to this property contained a reverting clause in case the land was not developed for the purpose for which it was given. This was later modified so that only five acres would revert to the original owner. The following year a special Campground Committee was appointed to investigate the feasibility of developing the plans for this property. After looking over the site donated to the Convention and considering the divided opinion as to its suitability for a campground and as a location for a home for disabled ministers, the committee recommended to the Convention that the property be deeded back to its original owner. They also recommended that the idea of

developing such a facility as was proposed be postponed indefinitely "until our people become more educated as to its need."

One can hardly escape the notion that the idea of developing a campground was ill-advised not only because few people felt the need for such a facility but also because of the depressed condition of the economy, which affected the confidence of many people as to what could be accomplished. The closing and the loss of Eureka College, followed by the failure of the Bible School at Smithfield had resulted in a crisis of confidence among many North Carolina Free Will Baptists. All this must be seen against the lingering effects of the economic depression which still kept many people living on the verge of poverty despite the programs of the New Deal.

A further complication of this crisis of confidence was the fact that some persons had not been able to put aside the ill feelings evoked by the accusatory statements made following the closing of Eureka College. Throughout the decade of the 1930's the Convention continued to feel the effects of this and other divisive issues. As a consequence there were several pastors and local churches which did not send representatives to the annual meetings. As testimony to this problem and attempts to resolve it, a resolution submitted by R. N. Hinnant in the 1937 session of the Convention may be cited. It read in part:

... therefore be it resolved that this body: 1. Express our sincere regret to any and all persons for past experiences of unkindness by this body 2. That from now on we use all Christian strategy possible to promote brotherly love among our brethren. 3. That we petition all pastors ... within our state to delegate from their churches to this body. 4. That we solicit the presence of all our ministers and their Christian fellowship in this organization.

Church Finance Association Organized

In the same session (1937) the Convention approved a motion in the report of the Executive Committee to deed the Smithfield Church property back to the trustees of that church not later than January 1, 1938. A committee was appointed to work jointly with the Cape Fear Conference to devise a plan to raise funds in order to pay off the indebtedness on the property. The Bible School, which had used the facilities of this church, had not been successful, in part because the financial support needed to assure its success had not been provided by local churches and other organizations.

On February 2, 1938, the Executive Committee of the Convention approved a motion to instruct the trustees of the Smithfield Church to deed this property to the trustees of the local church and the Cape Fear Conference jointly. This action was taken at the request of the Executive Committee of the Cape Fear Conference and the pastor of the local church and was related to the fact that the Conference was providing assistance in paying off the indebtedness on the Smithfield property.

As late as April 1940, the Executive Committee of the Convention was informed that the loan on the property of the Smithfield Church was in arrears. They therefore met to consider ways of assisting the church to meet its obligation so that the property could be deeded solely to the trustees of the local church. The local building and association would not agree to a conveyance of the property until the obligation was paid up to date. Rev. James A. Evans presented to the Executive Committee the idea of forming a corporation to assume the obligation of the local church, requiring that a second deed of trust be made to the corporation. Evans was then appointed chairman of a committee, which also included J. W. Alford and L. H. Wetherington, Sr., to obtain a charter for this corporation. Others present at this meeting indicated their desire to become members of the corporation by paying in specified amounts. On April 24, 1940, the committee submitted by-laws for the corporation to the Secretary of State of

North Carolina and a charter was granted on this same date. In this way the Church Finance Corporation (later known as the Church Finance Association, Inc.) was formed. On May 27 the committee met at Smithfield to begin their solicitation of memberships which could be obtained by individuals, churches, or church organizations. Their efforts were rewarded with success so that they were able not only to make a loan to the Smithfield Church but also to other churches needing financial assistance. In July 1941 the corporation was able to finance the remodeling of the building in Ayden which would serve as a new location for the Free Will Baptist Press.

Ordination of Women

Free Will Baptist women traditionally played a minor role in the business of the conferences and the Convention. In the nineteenth century the names of women were all but absent from the minutes of the conferences. Even in the State Convention, organized in 1913, women were seldom given a place on the program of its annual meetings. This is one reason why they had developed their own district and state conventions, to provide them with an important voice in directing the work initiated by women in the local churches. Now and then a woman was asked to give a prepared message at the State Convention of Churches. Katie Sawyer Jackson of Ayden, Georgia Frost Barnes of Lucama, and Alice E. Lupton of New Bern were several times called upon to speak on the role of women in the life and mission of the church. But it was rare indeed for a woman to assume the duties of a minister or to be ordained to that office among Free Will Baptists, despite the fact that the licensing and ordination of women was not uncommon among Northern Freewill Baptists. Statistics have recently been released by the American Baptist Historical Society which reveal that scores of women served as ministers in both the Northern Baptist and Northern Freewill Baptist denominations. Many North Carolina Free Will Baptists were familiar with Rev. Lizzie McAdams who with her husband had conducted numerous

revivals in this state and was still active in Texas, Oklahoma, and other western states. She frequently reported on their work in the *Free Will Baptist* and otherwise tried to maintain contacts with friends in North Carolina. During 1940-41, assisted by L. R. Ennis, Executive Secretary of the National Association, Reverends H. M. and Lizzie McAdams conducted a missionary tour in North Carolina which included visits to 115 churches. At that time Lizzie McAdams was serving as Home Missionary for the denomination. In the annual meeting of the National Association in 1942 she was elected to the Office of Promotional and Field Worker for Home Missions with a salary of \$50 per month.

In 1938 Lucy Wells was on the program at the annual meeting of the North Carolina Convention. She was asked by the program committee to conduct the devotions on Thursday morning. Reading from 1 Thessalonians, Chapter 5, she spoke on the subject of prayer. Later that same day she was asked to bring the Convention message at 11:00 a.m. in the absence of Rev. J. C. Moyer who was scheduled to preach but unable to attend. She continued to address the Convention on the same subject she had used in the morning devotions. Lucy Wells was a member of the Eastern Conference, having been enrolled as a minister of that body in 1937 after she was unanimously approved by the Examining Board and ordained as a minister of the gospel. The fact that this conference was willing to endorse the action of its Examining Board was either a tribute to Lucy Wells or it represented a shift in the attitude of this Free Will Baptist Conference toward the idea of ordaining women. Although some Free Will Baptists have been adamantly opposed to the ordination of women, the Convention has not supported such opposition and has recognized ordained women in the Piedmont Conference, which is affiliated with the Convention.

Because there was at this time no school of any kind operated by Free Will Baptists in North Carolina or elsewhere in the nation, it was decided that a Ministers' Institute would help to provide some training for ministers. The first such institute conducted in North Carolina was held for one week in August 1938 at Davis,

North Carolina. Short courses on Bible doctrine, homiletics, evangelism, English, church history, and auxiliary work were included in the schedule. Each evening there was a worship service featuring a sermon which dealt with some aspect of ministry. As stated in the last chapter, such institutes were conducted during this period in various locations for the benefit of ministers or candidates for the ministry in the Free Will Baptist Church. In the absence of a program of formal theological education these institutes represented an attempt to provide basic training for those who might otherwise receive little or no instruction in such subjects.

R. F. Pittman was scheduled to teach Bible doctrine in the institute held at Davis; however, he died as a result of gallbladder surgery on July 15, 1938. He had been a leader in the effort to provide an educational program at Ayden Seminary and Eureka College. At the time of his death he was serving as pastor of the Ayden Church. Under his leadership the church had built a new sanctuary following the loss of the main building of Eureka College, which this congregation had used as a place of worship. The new sanctuary was dedicated just a few weeks before his death.

Dispute Concerning the Publication of Literature

As early as 1941 there were rumblings of possible conflict between North Carolina Free Will Baptists and the National Association. A resolution adopted at the 1941 session of the North Carolina Convention echoes the feelings generated by the actions of the National Association in regard to the publication of literature for use by the denomination. This resolution refers to the "unfair and unchristian" competition between the Free Will Baptist Press of Ayden and the *Free Will Baptist Gem* of Monett, Missouri. The resolution called upon the General Board of the National Association to meet with the editors and managers of both these institutions to discuss and resolve the problem. If the General Board should disregard this request of the Convention,

then the Convention would resolve to "withdraw all support from the National Association, in its operation through its General Board and its Executive Secretary."

Another resolution approved by the Convention stated "that we cannot, at the present time and under the present conditions, go along with the National Association in their National Educational Program, until certain conditions are corrected and the money raised for that program is used for that purpose only." As a member of the Education Board of the National Association, J. R. Bennett was instructed not to vote for the purchase of Bible School property "until all misunderstandings regarding the program and the use of the money are cleared up." This resolution was prompted by the fact that a large portion of the salary of the Executive Secretary during the previous year had been paid out of funds allocated by the Education Board of the National Association. Also, the Education Board had designated money to be used for the conduct of Christian Workers Institutes, money which some felt had been raised to establish a Bible School.

The controversy did not end there, however. The Executive Committee of the National Association met following the annual session of the North Carolina Convention and passed some resolutions of its own. They stated that the first resolution passed at the 1941 session of the Convention was "unfair, unjust, and unethical" and proceeded to declare "a state of non-affiliation to be in effect" in regard to the North Carolina body. These and other conclusions reached by the National Executive Committee were then published in the *Free Will Baptist Gem*. This led to the calling of a meeting of the Executive Committee of the North Carolina Convention to discuss the resolutions passed at the recent session of the Convention as well as those passed by the Executive Committee of the National Association. At this meeting it was decided that the executive committees of the various conferences and associations in North Carolina should meet with the Convention Executive Committee to determine the position of the North Carolina Convention regarding its relationship to the national body and its program. This meeting was held on December 15, 1941,

at Ayden. After all the resolutions mentioned were read and fully discussed, it was moved and carried that the recent decision of the Executive Committee of the National Association be rejected and that North Carolina appeal to the National Association at its annual session to be held in 1942 at Columbus, Mississippi, for a final decision. At a subsequent meeting of the Executive Committee of the Convention it was noted that in addition to the previous actions of the National Executive Committee, they had now cautioned against placing anyone from North Carolina on the program of the 1942 session of the National Association. In view of these developments the Executive Committee of the North Carolina Convention appealed to the National Association for a "fair and impartial trial" with the opportunity to present the evidence which had prompted the passage of the first resolution mentioned above.

J. C. Griffin and J. W. Alford attended the meeting of the General Board of the National Association on July 14, 1942, and presented the appeal from North Carolina, which focused on the charge of unfair competition between the Press at Ayden and the *Free Will Baptist Gem*. It was made clear at this meeting that this competition was inspired by the action of the National Association in its 1940 session when it approved the by-laws for the National Sunday School Convention. In their appeal the two men from North Carolina urged the establishment of a Board of Publications and Literature which would award to the two publishers the privilege of publishing and the sale of Free Will Baptist literature on a cooperating and reciprocal basis rather than on a competitive basis which could in the end destroy both institutions.

The General Board accepted the recommendation to elect a Board of Publications and Literature and the delegates and ministers from North Carolina were seated at the meeting of the National Association in 1942. This way of resolving the issue brought peace to both parties in the dispute and helped to assure that for the foreseeable future North Carolina would continue to be a part of the National Association. The minutes of the Executive Committee of the Convention during this crisis reveals a continuing desire on the part of the elected leaders of the Convention to

belong to the National Association and to participate in its mission but not if it meant the sacrificing of an institution which had been engaged in the service of the denomination for many years prior to the organization of the National Association in 1935.

The Attack on Pearl Harbor

As a result of an attack on Pearl Harbor by the Japanese on December 7, 1941, the United States found itself involved in a global war of great magnitude. Like all citizens throughout the country, Free Will Baptists were concerned about the potential effects of this war on their lives, their country, and on the entire world. Recognizing the gravity of the conflict, R. B. Spencer, editor of the *Free Will Baptist*, published an editorial in the December 17 issue entitled "War and the Church." In it he described this war as "a struggle between the forces opposed to the Christian way of life and the cause of justice, humane living, and Christian principles of life." The attitude of the Christian in the face of such a conflict, he declared, should be one of loyalty to Christ and to home and country, undergirded by prayer to God for world peace and for the conversion of the enemy to right principles of action. He then discussed the responsibility of the Christian church which, he said, must remain steadfast in its support of human justice and in its faith in the supreme God to rule wisely and justly while it continues to move forward in its work of proclaiming peace and salvation to a sinful world. It must likewise be ready to provide material support and professional skill to alleviate human suffering wherever possible. Finally, it must take its stand for freedom of religion and freedom of liberal and democratic governments, so that peace and world order may soon be effected in the world.

This editorial was a rare statement among Free Will Baptists on a political matter of great importance to millions of people. Although the editor was content to limit his statement to generalities, he clearly perceived this conflict as a threat to the values cherished by Christians and all people of good will. Even though

some of his comments were similar to those which tend to confuse loyalty to Christ with patriotism, he was wise enough to see that this conflict, which would soon involve the United States at war with Nazi Germany, was of such nature as to threaten the survival of civilization, including Christianity itself. Many people throughout the Church Universal felt that the churches as well as individual Christians had an important stake in the outcome of this war; therefore, the call to sacrifice and to serve in appropriate ways seemed entirely proper. Free Will Baptists, though not a large denomination, were willing to respond to this challenge and to bear their share of the costs.¹

In 1942 when the U. S. government launched a campaign to sell bonds to help finance the war effort, the idea arose that in view of the need for a chapel at the Children's Home, Free Will Baptists could be asked to buy bonds in the name of the Home. These bonds would be given to the Home and designated for building a chapel after the war. In this way they would be helping the nation to fight the war against the Axis powers while at the same time helping to build a place of worship at the Children's Home. Other Free Will Baptists made greater sacrifices as they volunteered for service in the military or were drafted into the armed forces of the nation. Some of them made the ultimate sacrifice while serving their country in Europe, North Africa, or the Far East.

During the war Free Will Baptists were faced with the same restrictions and shortages felt by other citizens. At the same time incomes were rising because of labor shortages and the increased cost of maintaining both the war effort and the economy at home. One of the causes which received increasing support from North Carolina Free Will Baptists during the war was the Children's Home. In spite of limitations on travel in behalf of the Home, due to war-time restrictions, the total income reported in 1943 was \$41,093.80, of which approximately \$30,000 was received in gifts. This was by far the largest amount given to any of the causes sponsored by the Convention that year. It was indicative of the concern which Free Will Baptists had for the children at the Home

at a time when world chaos seemed to be threatening, as the news of the war reported tremendous losses sustained by the Allies both in Europe and in the Far East.

Support for the National Association

During the 1940's North Carolina Free Will Baptists continued to support the programs of the National Association while also providing for the needs of denominational enterprises sponsored by the State Convention. Following a decision by the National Association to establish an Executive Department and to employ an Executive Secretary, L. R. Ennis of Goldsboro, North Carolina, was offered the position. Rev. Ennis had been an active leader among Free Will Baptists in his home state for several years. Upon accepting this new job, he continued to serve as a pastor of churches in North Carolina for a time until sufficient funds were available to pay his salary. While serving as Executive Secretary he actively sought support for the programs of the National Association by attending the meetings of affiliated organizations, including the North Carolina Convention. He was given time on the program at these meetings to report on the progress being made and to solicit funds for these causes. In 1941 the National Association had approved a Unified Program which provided that each denominational board would receive a percentage of the money sent to the Unified Program. In 1943 the North Carolina Convention voted to send twenty-five percent of the funds raised by its Field Secretary, other than amounts designated for specific purposes, to the Unified Program of the National Association. The Convention also recommended that the conferences, associations, and union meetings in the state allocate twenty-five percent of their funds to the Unified Program. Support for the Unified Program, as well as giving to specific agencies of the National Association, increased year by year as more and more people were informed at denominational meetings and through the literature being published and distributed by mail. The response was gratifying even during the war years (1941-1945) but particularly

in the post-war period as the economy shifted from the production of war materials to goods and services that benefitted the entire population. As family incomes increased, the support for church programs of every kind showed a significant increase.

When Robert Crawford was chosen as Executive Secretary of the National Association in 1943 to succeed L. R. Ennis, who became president of the Bible College, he too was received well by Free Will Baptists in North Carolina. Year by year he attended the North Carolina Convention, representing all of the agencies of the national body and encouraging support for each one. In addition, the Field Secretary of the Convention, J. C. Griffin, not only sought support for Convention causes but also spoke on every occasion at denominational meetings in behalf of the causes sponsored by the National Association. Clearly, there was a growing spirit of cooperation with the national body and most of the leadership in North Carolina were supportive of this trend.

In 1945 the National Association initiated a campaign to raise \$100,000 for the Free Will Baptist Bible College in Nashville and asked that one-fifth of this amount be raised in North Carolina. At the North Carolina Convention in September of that year a resolution signed by L. R. Ennis (then serving as president of the Bible College), Rashie Kennedy, and W. L. Moretz was adopted, which commended the wisdom of expanding the facilities of the College, accepted the request for \$20,000 to be raised by North Carolina Free Will Baptists, and directed the Board of Education and the Field Secretary to give full cooperation to the conduct of this appeal for funds.

In later years similar appeals for funds were made in behalf of the programs sponsored by the National Association and were met with a generous response on the part of North Carolina Free Will Baptists. Most of the funds from North Carolina were sent by local churches directly to the agencies of the National Association rather than through the Convention treasurer. Money for missions was usually sent to the treasurer of the State Mission Board, who in turn divided it equally between home and foreign missions except for those funds that were designated for one or the

other. Money for foreign missions was then sent to the National Board. Support for this cause began to increase after World War II, thanks in part to the fact that Miss Barnard had returned to India and that another missionary would join her in the near future. The Thomas Willeys were now in Cuba and the work there was beginning to show signs of progress with the establishment of a school to train native preachers. In 1947 Mrs. Josephine Stevens, wife of Harold Stevens, was designated as a Free Will Baptist missionary to go to South Africa where they would both serve under an independent board.

Acquisition of Cragmont Property

The idea of Christian camping began to take hold among North Carolina Free Will Baptists in the late 1930's and early 1940's. The state League and Sunday School Conventions initiated the effort to provide a camping experience for young people for one week each year. Arrangements were made to rent the facilities of Camp Leach, which was owned and operated by the North Carolina Diocese of the Episcopal Church, for this purpose. Located on the Pamlico River, it was accessible to large numbers of Free Will Baptists living in eastern North Carolina. However, in the summer of 1944 it was not available because of a full schedule and it became necessary to look elsewhere. R. B. Spencer and James A. Evans were given the task of locating a facility to rent or perhaps to purchase. In the summer of 1945 the League Convention sponsored a week at Blue Ridge Assembly, using a part of the facilities of this Y.M.C.A. camp.

Meanwhile the Sunday School Convention, the League Convention, and the Woman's Auxiliary Convention were showing interest in the development of a retreat center for all age groups at a suitable location. This idea was discussed at their meetings and in private conversations across the state. At its second annual meeting in 1941 the Sunday School Convention heard a report from its Field Secretary and Assembly Camp Committee which recommended that these three auxiliaries, together with the

ministers' organization, cooperate in promoting a plan to purchase land and build suitable structures for an assembly, working through elected committees representing each of these organizations of the denomination. The assembly would belong to all of the participating organizations. The Sunday School Convention proposed to begin raising its share of the necessary funds through the distribution of small "banks" to all Sunday schools. Individuals would be asked to put a small contribution in these "banks" each Sunday. The president of the Convention set a goal of \$1,000 to be raised by the next annual meeting.

The following year (1942) at the annual meeting of the State Convention of Churches, M. L. Johnson, chairman of the Camp Committee of the Sunday School Convention, requested that a resolution of support for the building of an assembly be approved by the Convention of Churches. Thus the latter organization became involved in this project. Very little was done, however, until 1944 except to keep the idea before the people and to collect funds in the hope that this dream of a facility that would benefit the entire denomination could become a reality.

At the 1944 session of the State Convention of Churches the Assembly Grounds Committee of the Convention in its report offered a resolution calling upon the Convention to authorize locating and acquisition of a suitable site for an assembly in cooperation with the Sunday School, League, and Woman's Auxiliary conventions. A Central Committee representing each of these organizations was formed and the task of finding a suitable site was begun. Suggested locations were visited and evaluated in the eastern part of the state but there was no final decision until the summer of 1945 when the committee was informed that the Cragmont Sanatorium facilities near Black Mountain were available. The facilities included a large building and several smaller ones as well as 115 acres of land. After the committee visited the site, they decided to take an option on it and to raise the purchase price of \$10,000. Most of this amount would have to be in hand to pay off the balance owed by November 1. James A. Evans was made chairman of the fund raising campaign. He proposed a plan

to choose ten "captains" who would be responsible for raising \$1,000 each. A prospectus giving basic information and a picture of the Cragmont property was given to each captain, who was asked to solicit gifts of \$100 from individuals, churches, and other church organizations. A record of the names of donors was kept by the committee.² Mr. Fountain Taylor was the first captain to complete the goal of \$1,000. During the remainder of his life he was one of the most loyal supporters of Cragmont Assembly. Once the property was deeded to the Board of Trustees, Cragmont Assembly was incorporated and a Board of Directors representing the sponsoring organizations was chosen to make policies governing the assembly and to choose the manager who would be responsible for day-to-day operations. In the summer of 1946 the first schedule of week-long conferences were held. The first annual Sunday School Institute was conducted during two weeks in June of that year at Cragmont. The first Ministers' Institute was also held that summer during the week of June 24-28. Each year since then the Ministerial Association of Original Free Will Baptists has sponsored a Ministers' Conference, which includes the annual meeting of the association, at Cragmont. Likewise, youth and woman's auxiliary conferences have been conducted each summer since 1946.

A Promotional Office

Beginning in the 1920's the North Carolina Convention through its Executive Committee had chosen a minister to serve as Field Secretary of the state-wide organization. The duties of this office included the collection and dissemination of information concerning the denomination within the state, the promotion of the causes sponsored by the Convention, and soliciting the participation of churches, conferences, and associations in the annual meetings and on-going activities for the Convention. J. C. Griffin served as Field Secretary for many years with little remuneration beyond his actual travel expenses. A more faithful servant of the denomination could hardly be found during this period. He

understood, perhaps better than anyone, that the work he was doing, in addition to his responsibilities as a pastor, required more time and energy than he was able to give to it. Therefore, in 1944 he and M. L. Johnson presented a resolution at the annual meeting of the Convention asking that the Convention go on record as favoring the establishment of the office of full-time Promotional Director, which would replace the office of Field Secretary, and that the Executive Committee be asked to prepare such plans and recommendations as would be necessary to establish this office.

By this time the Convention had developed a "Five-Point Program" of denominational enterprises (now called ministries). Posters were printed which identified these programs and which designated the months during which emphasis was to be given to the support of these causes by the local churches. The Field Secretary endeavored to remind the pastors and other church officials of the present status and needs of each denominational enterprise through letters, visits to conferences and union meetings, and his weekly column in the *Free Will Baptist*. He also made some use of films to inform church members about the progress of denominational programs. During the war years his travel was limited to attending the larger conferences and union meetings and auxiliary conventions because of tire and gasoline rationing. When the war ended in 1945 there was a definite need for more promotional work and the best way to achieve this seemed to be through the employment of a Promotional Director. However, this could only be done if there were funds available to support the work of this office.

The Executive Committee of the Convention did little to establish the Office of Promotional Director beyond asking the churches to contribute toward the support of this office should a person be chosen to fill the position. Then on November 28, 1945, the committee met and decided to employ J. C. Griffin as Promotional Director with the stipulation that he would devote at least five days each month to this work at a salary of \$20 per month plus travel expenses up to 200 miles per month at three cents per mile. This was a small step toward providing a full-time

director, but further action would depend upon a method of financing this office. At the annual meeting of the Convention in 1946 a committee appointed to propose a plan for the support of a full-time Promotional Director recommended that Promotional Work be added to the Convention program, which would now be a "Six-Point Program" and that the Director be required to solicit funds for the entire program and to remit all funds to the treasurer of the Convention.

In his report at the 1946 session of the Convention J. C. Griffin stated that from a total of 250 churches to which he had sent report forms to be completed and returned, only eighty-four churches had responded by sending in their reports. This was an indication that the Convention was unable to involve more than one-third of the churches which could be identified throughout the state in its annual reporting system. From various sources, including annual minutes of conferences and associations, Griffin had obtained sufficient information to state that there were as many as 326 churches and 292 ministers (including retirees and licentiates) throughout the state and a total church membership of about 38,000.

The lack of funds to support a full-time Promotional Director continued to be a problem for the Convention. J. C. Griffin had served for a time on a very limited budget. In 1949, after the office had been vacant for more than a year, R. N. Hinnant was asked by the Executive Committee of the Convention to coordinate the work of the "Seven-Point Program" (Cragmont Assembly had been added as the seventh point). He was to be paid three dollars per day and traveling expenses. Then in 1950 a resolution was adopted by the Convention which urged that definite action be taken at this session to locate an office and elect a person who would perform the work of a Promotional Secretary, but no immediate action was taken in response to this resolution. However, on October 26, 1950, the Executive Committee agreed to employ M. L. Johnson to assume the duties of this office on a part-time basis. Following his appointment he submitted his recommendations for the work of this office. If they had been

implemented, this office would have provided a larger service to the denomination than at any time in the past. The development of a Promotional Office for the Convention did not receive the support needed in order to become an effective agency for several decades. As a result each board or institution developed its own promotional materials and made direct solicitations to pastors and churches for their support. The need for a Promotional Secretary who could coordinate all of these agencies and assist them in raising funds to meet their annual budgets was an ideal to be achieved, but its achievement would depend upon closer cooperation among the different agencies and a more centralized program than many Free Will Baptists wanted to see. They were more reluctant to follow this trend as a result of their observations concerning the role of the Executive Department of the National Association. Many felt that this agency was attempting to wield too much power in the politics of the National Association and in so doing had alienated other agencies and boards of that organization.

Two New Conferences Organized

At a special session of the Beaver Creek Association in North and South Carolina on December 4, 1943, the North Carolina churches asked for letters of dismissal from the association in order to organize an association which could affiliate with the Convention in North Carolina and support its programs. At 1:30 p.m. that day the ministers and delegates of ten churches that had been granted their request for dismissal met to organize. They chose the name "Piedmont Association of the (Original) Free Will Baptist Church" and elected Elder O. M. Hilburn as moderator and E. W. O'Dell as clerk. An Ordaining Council and an Executive Board were also elected. The "Treatise of Faith and Practice of Free Will Baptists" was adopted.

The first annual session of the association was held on August 3-4, 1944, at North Belmont, North Carolina, with Goshen Grove Church as host. A constitution drawn up by officials of the

association was presented to the body and adopted. Reports from the churches were received and several committees were chosen and later presented their reports during the session.

In September 1944 the Piedmont Association was admitted to full fellowship in the North Carolina Convention in session at Reedy Branch Church, Pitt County.

Another new conference was organized in 1945 to be known as the Albemarle Conference. It had its beginning in the Albemarle Union, which had been a part of the Central Conference for many years. In 1944 the Albemarle Union decided that it wished to organize as a conference separate from the Central Conference at its annual session in 1944. The boundary line for this new conference was to be from Belhaven to Williamston northward and was to include the Tidewater area of Virginia. As many as eighteen Free Will Baptist churches were located in this region.

The first session of the Albemarle Conference was held at Sound Side Church, Tyrell County, on October 10-11, 1945. W. A. Hales was elected as moderator and R. P. Harris as clerk. The various boards and committees necessary to carry on the functions of the conference were also chosen. Seven ordained ministers and three licentiates were listed as members and seventeen churches were represented at this first session. Fraternal delegates from other conferences and associations attended and were seated, as well as representatives of denominational enterprises. Some churches belonging to the Albemarle Conference were represented at the 1946 annual meeting of the North Carolina Convention.

North Carolina Polity Retained

North Carolina Free Will Baptists were reluctant to surrender their denominational traditions by which they had identified themselves long before the formation of the National Association. Although the ministers and delegates at the 1936 annual meeting of the State Convention had voted to change the name of the organization to the "State Association of Churches" in recognition of its affiliation with the National Association, in 1947 the

Executive Committee in its annual report to the Convention recommended that the name of the state organization be changed to its original name, "State Convention of Churches." Later in the session the Resolutions Committee proposed a constitutional change which would make this change official. During this same period from 1936 to 1947 the conferences in North Carolina also chose to use the term "association" rather than "conference" to designate themselves.

Meanwhile the conferences and the Convention continued to recognize the "Statement of Faith and Discipline" which had been in use in slightly revised form since 1812. They did not formally adopt the National Association Treatise which was agreed upon by that body in its first session in 1935 but instead continued to use their own Statement of Faith and Discipline, especially in matters affecting church polity. Thus, ministers were licensed, ordained, and disciplined and churches were organized and governed in accordance with the rules set forth in the North Carolina document. The conferences likewise conducted their affairs in relation to both ministers and member churches in keeping with long established traditions embodied in that same document. The fact that this instrument had been in use long before the National Association was formed and had proved to be an effective means of ordering church life and the fact that the National Association was seen as a cooperative fellowship having no jurisdiction over its constituent members made it seem unwise and unnecessary to abandon the Statement of Faith and Discipline recognized by Original Free Will Baptists in North Carolina.

Although in a meeting of the Executive Committee of the North Carolina Convention on November 14, 1946, a committee of three was appointed to work with committees appointed by the various conferences to study and make recommendations to these bodies regarding the adoption of the National Association Treatise, no action on this matter was taken until the report of a Treatise Revision Committee was presented to the Convention by R. N. Hinnant, chairman, at the 1948 session of the Convention. This report was adopted by the Convention and subsequently by the

requisite number of conferences and associations in North Carolina (two-thirds). The result was the publication of "A Treatise of Faith and Government for the Original Free Will Baptists of North Carolina" in 1949. This document included the Articles of Faith in the 1949 National Treatise along with the Church Covenant, but the "Rules of Church Discipline" was a revision of the rules of church government which had been used in North Carolina for more than a century. A further revision of the Rules of Church Discipline was approved by the Convention and the conferences/associations in 1954 and published the following year. Although these revisions were deemed to be in harmony with the National Treatise, they were in fact based upon a different tradition of church polity and were not in verbal agreement with the National Treatise.

It is a well-known fact that other state organizations and even district associations had their own statements of Faith and Discipline. For example, the Midway Association in Georgia published a Book of Discipline in 1902 which contained articles of faith as well as matters pertaining to the government of the church. This document was in many respects different from the North Carolina Discipline and also from the Treatise adopted by the National Association in 1935. In 1960 the Midway Association voted to update its Book of Discipline, but did not attempt to make it conform to the language of the National Treatise. In fact, there were state associations other than the North Carolina Convention which did not adopt the National Treatise in its entirety until after the issue of church government was raised in the early 1960's. Not until the mid-1950's was there any pressure from the National body upon the state and local organizations to adopt the National Treatise. Prior to the controversy over church government which erupted in 1960, the National Association did not seek to interfere with the actions of state and local organizations in dealing with issues or problems that arose. It was not the intention of those who were instrumental in bringing about the merger of the two organizations that formed the National Association in 1935 to give it the authority to require any state or local organization to change

their customs or usages or even to adopt the National Treatise. The "Provision and Claim" on page 39 of the National Treatise, 1958 edition, makes that point unmistakably clear.

Children's Home Development

During the post-war period the income of the Children's Home showed significant increases, but because of inflation the costs of operation also increased. In 1947 the Home served ninety children of which all but twelve had lost one or both parents. A chapel was under construction on the campus, a project that was delayed until after the war. Funds for this project were being received, but the costs of construction were expected to be far above the amount estimated when the plans were first approved. Churches and individuals made contributions toward this effort, some being designated for memorial windows and doors in the new structure. When construction of the building was nearing completion in January 1948, the question of naming the chapel was considered at a joint meeting of the Convention Executive Committee and the Children's Home Board. The Cape Fear Union had suggested that it be named in memory of W. A. Jackson, now deceased, who had served on the board for many years. In view of the fact that the pioneer supporters of the Home had not been memorialized in any way, it was decided that the new building should be named the Orphanage Memorial Chapel.

The superintendent, James A. Evans, had provided wise leadership in the administration of the home during the war years and was beginning to propose plans for developing the facilities and personnel of the institution so that it could provide better services to the boys and girls in its care. The Board of Trustees recommended to the Convention in 1947 that \$75,000 be raised from Free Will Baptist churches and individuals for the Home, an amount much larger than had been given in previous years. Although the financial report in 1948 showed that the churches failed to reach this goal, there was a growing interest in this cause as the churches increased their stewardship during the post-war

years.

By 1944 the Children's Home had acquired a total of 361 acres of land, much of which was in cultivation or used as permanent pasture. During the 1950's further development of the campus witnessed the replacement of the boy's dormitory, which was built in 1925, by the Albemarle Cottage in 1951. The beautiful Memorial Chapel was finally completed in 1952. A new girls' complex, consisting of two cottages, named for S. A. Smith and B. B. Deans, was built in 1953. A new laundry building was completed and a new home for the superintendent was built in 1957.

Establishment of Mount Olive College

In 1945 the North Carolina Convention created a new board to be known as the Board of Christian Education. The constitution of the Convention was amended to provide for the addition of this board whose duties were "to keep our people informed about the Christian Education Program of our Church; endeavor to promote the cause of Christian Education, receive funds . . . , and place same as they are instructed; and in general to cooperate with the National Educational Program." Each year this board reported to the Convention and included in its report the amounts received and disbursed. Most of the funds were sent to the Free Will Baptist Bible College.

Meanwhile, there was a growing interest among North Carolina Free Will Baptists in the establishment of an educational program within the state. In its report to the Convention in 1951 the board called attention to the desire for such a program "that will more adequately meet the present and future needs of our people in general." In view of this need they recommended consultation with the Board of Trustees of Cragmont Assembly to devise plans for establishing a junior college that would use the facilities at Cragmont during the off season. The board proceeded to obtain a charter for the new college to be named Mount Allen Junior College for the mountain which overlooks Cragmont. The

Charter was granted on November 27, 1951. Arrangements were made with the Cragmont Board to operate the school at Cragmont beginning in the fall of 1952. It opened in September with Rev. Lloyd Vernon as president and teacher along with Rev. A. B. Chandler as Business Education teacher. The course of study included high school subjects, business education, religious education, and Bible. There were ten applications reported but only six students were enrolled in September and a total of twelve during the year. Both teachers commuted to Black Mountain from eastern North Carolina where they served as pastors on weekends. It was a small beginning but through the diligence and sacrifice of the faculty and the support of interested persons they were able to finish the school year.

At the 1953 session of the Convention in September the Board of Christian Education included in its report a recommendation that Mount Allen Junior College be moved to the eastern part of the state, nearer the center of Free Will Baptist activity, and that public school property in the town of Mount Olive be purchased to provide facilities for the operation of the college. A city block on which an abandoned school building stood could be obtained at a cost of \$25,000. They also recommended that the Convention create a Board of Directors to be responsible for the management and operation of the college. They asked that the following persons become members of the board: David W. Hansley, M. L. Johnson, R. N. Hinnant, J. W. Alford, C. J. Harris, N. B. Barrow, Earl Glenn, R. H. Jackson, and A. B. Chandler.

The total expenditures for the first year of operation at Cragmont was \$8,561.27. There was a balance of \$6.17 in the fund for Mount Allen College at the end of that first year's operation. It was a bold step for the Convention to approve the purchase of the property in Mount Olive with such a small figure on hand and no plan by which to raise the money needed to pay for it. The building itself was in need of major repairs before it could be used to operate even the very modest beginnings of a college. During the 1953-54 school year a few classes in Bible and related subjects were conducted in the building while initial

steps were taken to begin a collegiate program in September 1954. David W. Hansley, chairman of the Board of Directors, played a leading role in preparing the building for occupancy and in choosing the leadership for the fledgling institution. In the spring of 1954 James A. Evans was employed by the Board as Public Relations Director. He would undertake to raise funds and recruit the first class of students. Among other things the Board gave its attention to choosing the president, someone who was qualified to launch a collegiate program and capable of leading the effort to win the support of the denomination as well as the Mount Olive community. The man chosen by the Board for this task was Rev. W. Burkette Raper.

In September 1953 Raper had been asked by the Executive Committee of the Convention to serve as Promotional Director to succeed M. L. Johnson on October 1. A full-time Director was not feasible at the time; hence, Raper, who was serving as pastor of Hull Road Church in Greene County, agreed to serve on a part-time basis at a salary of \$100 per month plus office and travel expenses. Raper was a graduate of Duke University and of Duke Divinity School. He had proved to be a successful pastor and gave promise of being an able administrator and competent spokesman for Christian higher education. In July 1954 he was asked by the chairman of the Board of Directors, David W. Hansley, if he would accept the position as president of Mount Allen Junior College. Two weeks later, after carefully considering the matter, he accepted the Board's offer. On July 22 he resigned as Promotional Director in order to begin his duties as president of the college. In his report to the Convention as Promotional Director he stated that he had resigned in order to serve in another capacity. The greatest promotional work our denomination needs, he added, is in the field of Christian education. "My prayer," he wrote, "is that we shall build in this state a college that is both Christian and sound in scholarship. Out of our small beginnings is a vision of an educational institution that will be an honor to our denomination and a credit to the cause of education in general. I solicit your prayers, cooperation, and support."

The task of gathering a faculty and overseeing preparations for the opening of the school term in September fell upon the new president. He had assumed this demanding role at the age of twenty-six and seemed undaunted by the challenge it offered. In addition to fund raising and administrative responsibilities he also taught the courses in Bible and attended to dozens of minor details in the operation of the college.

The 1954-55 school year began with twenty-two students, drawn from eastern North Carolina. The curriculum included basic courses at the freshman level and a one-year business program. Very little could be provided in the area of student life because of limited facilities and personnel, yet a wholesome atmosphere prevailed and lasting friendships were made. Gifts to the college that year totaled \$33,689.56 in addition to contributions of food, materials, labor, supplies, and other gifts-in-kind. Dr. C. C. Henderson made the first gift to the college endowment fund in the form of stock in the Mount Olive Pickle Company valued at \$5,000. Progress was also made in the acquisition of library books.

During the first two years significant progress occurred in the development of the college. Enrollment had increased to a total of eighty-seven students in the fall of 1956, including evening classes. The Total gifts for the 1955-56 year was \$58,966.08 and endowment funds now exceeded \$30,000. The name of the college had been changed to Mount Olive Junior College in recognition of its present location and plans had been made to purchase an additional fifty acres of land for future development north of the main campus. An architect was employed to begin work on a master plan for a new campus. In 1958 the college received state accreditation by the North Carolina College Conference and began to make necessary preparation for regional accreditation by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. A special session of the Convention of Churches was held on the campus on January 31, 1958, "to give attention to the needs and opportunities for Christian higher education among Free Will Baptists through the program of Christian education at Mount Olive Junior College."

The main object of this special session was to launch a three-year fund-raising campaign for the operation and development of the college. The goal was set at \$504,000. Among other actions taken at this session the Convention approved a motion "endorsing the concept that Mount Olive Junior College be made a citadel for liberal arts education in keeping with the highest Christian and academic standards."

As student enrollment increased, new faculty were added in the fall of 1957. By this time a two-year liberal arts program had been developed so that students could earn an associate degree. A one-year business program was also available by which students could earn a certificate in business. Most students who earned an associate degree elected to continue their education at a senior college or university. Courses in Bible were required in every curriculum and chapel attendance was compulsory. Students were encouraged to participate in religious activities as well as organizations designed to enhance total student development. By September 1958 enrollment had reached 110 students in the junior college program, plus thirty-two special and adult students.

An important plateau was reached in December 1960 when the college achieved full accreditation by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. A great deal of work had been done by the entire faculty and administration in order to reach this goal but once it was accomplished, the development of the college had only just begun.

Local Church Progress in the 1950's

Throughout its history the Original Free Will Baptist Church had been a rural denomination. Even though some churches were established in towns, the membership of these churches frequently reflected their rural background. Most rural churches in the denomination did not have resident pastors prior to the 1950's. Few churches had a parsonage or provided housing for the pastor. The great majority of rural churches held regular worship services on only one or perhaps two Sundays each month.

Since the churches in rural areas were largely dependent on a farm economy, as farmers began to enjoy a higher level of prosperity in the 1950's, so did the churches. Many churches decided to rebuild or remodel their facilities. Since the Sunday school, which convened every Sunday morning, was likely to be the most active auxiliary of the local church, new Sunday school rooms were added or a new sanctuary was built and the old one converted into space for the Sunday school. As the stewardship and the incomes of church members increased, some local churches decided to move to half-time or full-time worship services. Thus, they would have worship services on two Sundays or every Sunday each month instead of one or perhaps two Sundays. Those churches which were fortunate enough to have good leadership or were located in supportive communities saw their membership increase. Sunday school and church attendance reached new heights as most families could now afford to own cars that would take them anywhere they chose. Gasoline and tires as well as new automobiles were no longer in short supply as they had been during the war years. As the level of participation in church activities increased, the desire to have a resident pastor likewise grew. Often this meant building a parsonage if other suitable housing was not available near the church. Gradually the idea of a full church program of Sunday morning and evening services and mid-week Bible study and prayer meeting became the rule in most rural churches. In addition, there were the weekly Sunday school and League on Sunday morning and evening and women's circle and class meetings, usually held monthly.

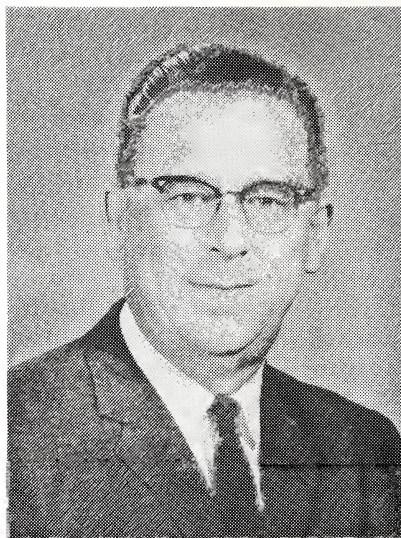
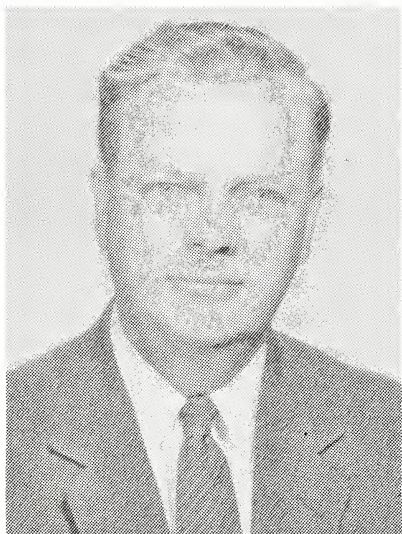
During this same period the summer Vacation Bible School also became a popular feature of church life. Classes for all age groups were held in order to focus on some part of the Bible or a particular theme that would have wide appeal. As soon as the Free Will Baptist Press could gear up to provide literature for Vacation Bible School, materials became available for both instruction and simple crafts. Children and youth especially enjoyed these activities during a week after the closing of public schools for the summer months. It became customary to have a

special program at week's end to provide an opportunity for the children to demonstrate their new knowledge and experiences gained during the week.

This increased involvement in church life among Free Will Baptists was part of a nation-wide movement in the 1950's which was commonly regarded as a religious revival. This revival was characterized by a substantial increase in church attendance and in the willingness of most of the population to identify with some religious organization. Religious books became more popular as publishers realized that these books could become best-sellers. Evangelists like Billy Graham began to attract huge audiences during city-wide campaigns and their audiences were greatly increased by the use of radio and television. Graham's willingness to cooperate with church leaders across a broad spectrum of theological opinion made his campaigns popular events and provided assured results. Churches located in major cities where Graham's campaigns were conducted saw their membership increase and wider participation in the life of the churches. Churches in rural areas benefitted indirectly by the fact that Graham's message could be heard on "The Hour of Decision" and his later campaigns were broadcast on nation-wide television hookups. Also, during this period Free Will Baptist churches saw significant results from week-long revivals held once or twice each year. Many churches added new members and witnessed rededication during such local revivals.

Some church historians attribute much of the success of this religious revival in the 1950's to an underlying anxiety among Americans as a result of the Cold War, the threat of Communism, and the destructive powers of the atom bomb. The United States and its Allies had been successful against the Axis powers in World War II, but now it seemed that an even greater threat of annihilation was hanging over the western world as the U.S.S.R. began to develop nuclear weapons and later launched a space program which revealed their technological advances in comparison with that of the U.S. Some evangelists sought to capitalize on this fear of many Americans by emphasizing an anti-Communist

theme in their messages to the American public. The Korean War in the early 1950's made the threat of Communist expansion seem all the more ominous. Senator Joseph McCarthy's tactics in trying to ferret out Communist sympathizers in public life and the news coverage given to his Senate Committee and to the hearings conducted by the House Un-American Activities Committee of the U. S. Congress only added to the feeling of anxiety on the part of many Americans. It would be impossible to estimate what effect such fears had upon Free Will Baptists. One can only assume that if they tried to stay abreast of news events of the day, they would be affected in some measure.



Top: N. Bruce Barrow; W. Burkette Raper
Bottom: Lloyd Vernon; M. L. Johnson



Top: Loy E. Ballard; C. L. Patrick
 Bottom: Dola Dudley; Earl Glenn, D. W. Hansley,
 Lloyd Vernon, R. H. Jackson

Chapter XIV

Conflict with the National Association

This chapter in the history of Original Free Will Baptists deals with perhaps the most painful sequence of events in the memory of those still living who experienced these troubled times. There had been tension from time to time in the relationship between the North Carolina Convention and the National Association of Free Will Baptists, but no one could foresee what the outcome of this relationship would be.

That such a division as occurred should happen at some time ought not to surprise anyone who is familiar with the history of Protestantism in general and of Baptists in particular. Almost every denomination in America has experienced at some time in its history a division or defection in its ranks that could be attributed to a variety of issues or causes. At a time when Christians should be giving evidence of their unity in Christ and working together to achieve common goals because of the many forces working against them, it is all the more reprehensible that they should spend their energies and resources fighting among themselves. Such conflicts often occur between factions that share many beliefs and values in common but allow their differences to gain control of their attitudes and actions in relation to each other. At times those differences are of paramount importance to one or another of the contending factions while at other times the differences are more imaginary than real and could be resolved in a spirit of Christian brotherhood. The fact is that it is sometimes easier to be tolerant of others who are different if the contending parties are not bound together in an organized fellowship.

How did this conflict arise among Free Will Baptists which led to division in 1962? We have already observed that the two organizations which formed the National Association in 1935 were of diverse origins and that customs and traditions had developed within both groups which they were not required to surrender in order to belong to the national body. In fact, it was assumed that

the two separate organizations would continue their existence, each with their own state and district organizations. This did not happen and the trend was toward strengthening the national body at the expense of regional and state organizations.

More than once the constitution of the National Association was changed to allow for more representation down to and including the local church. Still, the number of ministers who registered at the annual meetings of the association far outnumbered the delegates from churches and state organizations. This can and often does result in a "priest-ridden" denomination which should otherwise emphasize the role of the laity in church affairs. It is perhaps easier to build a strong national organization when the great majority of those who attend its annual meetings and participate directly in its various board meetings and other activities are ministers who have begun to share common interests and common views. A more equitable representation by an informed laity would have provided a different perspective on the issues facing the National Association.

Most observers of the conflict that led to the separation of the North Carolina Convention from the National Association seem to agree on the major contributing causes of the division. Each of these contributing factors will be treated under separate headings.

Dispute Between the Press and the Sunday School Board

We have seen that almost from the beginning of the National Association some Free Will Baptists, particularly in the West, had questions concerning the role of the Free Will Baptist Press in the denomination at large. Although it had published a weekly magazine for several decades prior to 1935 and had supplied literature for the Sunday schools and other auxiliaries of the local church throughout the denomination for many years, it was not owned by the National Association. Initiated as a stock company, most of its stock was owned by churches and church organizations in North Carolina, though shares of stock were available for purchase by Free Will Baptists anywhere. These shares paid no

dividends to any shareholder but were simply an investment in the publishing of literature for the denomination. Any profits were to be given to other denominational causes.

Since the National Association at first received no regular income from the literature published by the Press, the General Board of the Association was able to obtain from the Press Board an agreement whereby the former would receive a percentage of the sales of Sunday school literature in exchange for promoting the sale of that literature throughout the denomination. For a time this agreement appeared to be satisfactory to both parties, but before long there were disputes concerning the terms of the agreement, which led to meetings aimed at resolving these conflicts. When the National Association created a Sunday School Board which would have the oversight of the denomination's Sunday school program, this board was expected to continue the agreement with the Press and would have the right to approve all writers of the Sunday school literature. Their budget for operations would come from a percentage of literature sales under the terms of the contract. In time this arrangement proved less than satisfactory to the Sunday School Board. At bottom the issue was, who should control the publication of literature for the denomination? As so often happens in such situations, the whole matter became a power struggle between two contending parties.

Finally, in 1957 the Sunday School Board decided to begin a literature program of its own while still trying to maintain its contractual relationship to the Press. Therefore, the Executive Committee of the North Carolina Convention presented a resolution to the General Board of the National Association protesting the action of the Sunday School Board and requesting the General Board to intervene in order to prevent the Sunday School Board from publishing and selling literature in competition with the Free Will Baptist Press in violation of their agreement in a joint meeting on March 1, 1956. The General Board decided to refer this matter to the National body. After heated debate on the floor of the annual meeting in July, 1958 the motion to adopt the request of the North Carolina Executive Committee was lost. The Sunday

School Board therefore proceeded with plans to assume full responsibility for publishing literature for Free Will Baptist Sunday schools.

By the end of 1958 it became clear that the Sunday School Board had been too optimistic concerning the operation of their program, for by that date there was a deficit of \$20,000 and the entire Board had resigned. The General Board then authorized its Executive Committee to take over the functions of the Sunday School Board until a new board could be elected. In its report to the National body in 1959 the General Board presented the full text of a new proposed contract between the Free Will Baptist Press and the Sunday School Board and recommended its adoption. Among other items in the proposed contract, the Sunday School Board agreed "To recognize the Free Will Baptist Press ... as the Sunday school publishing house and/or agency of the Free Will Baptist denomination" and "To use all funds received from the Free will Baptist Press for general promotion of the denominational Sunday school program." The Press agreed to "work harmoniously" with the Sunday School Board and to allocate to the Sunday School Board a minimum of eight percent of gross receipts from the sale of literature published by the Press. A drastic reduction of operating costs and increased income enabled the Sunday School Board to pay off most of the debt within two years.

At the meeting of the National Association in 1961 the body approved a motion to amend an item in the General Board's report by substituting a provision which declared vacant the offices of five men from North Carolina who had signed an affidavit in a court case in Durham, North Carolina, without giving these men a hearing. (More information on this case will be given below.) This and other actions taken in opposition to North Carolina Free Will Baptist positions on church polity by the National Association resulted in a crisis of relationship between the North Carolina Convention and the National Association. The Free Will Baptist Press asked that time be given to sort out these problems, whereupon the Sunday School Board took the position that the Press Board had violated the contract. Notice of termination of the

contract was filed with the Free Will Baptist Press by the Sunday School Board as of January 12, 1962, and the Board proceeded once again to publish its own Sunday school literature for the denomination.

This conflict between the Sunday School Board of the National Association and the Free Will Baptist Press, as well as the general attitude toward the Press which had developed in some circles of the National body was a contributing factor in the division that occurred in 1962, but it was at times overshadowed by other factors which threatened to disrupt the unity of the denomination.

Disagreement Over Educational Philosophy¹

In the last chapter we described the founding of Mount Olive College and the initial steps taken to build a strong liberal arts program that would meet the needs of Original Free Will Baptists, as well as the student population in the area where the college was located. In charting the future course of the college the administration and Board of Directors felt that a regionally accredited college would best serve the needs of the church. Therefore, in a meeting on February 7, 1956, the Board voted to "authorize the President to proceed in whatever manner necessary in obtaining accreditation." The administration and faculty first sought accreditation by the North Carolina College Conference, which was granted in November, 1958. They then proceeded to meet the standards for membership in the Southern Association and this goal was achieved when the college was granted regional accreditation on December 1, 1960. This was perhaps the most significant date in the early history of the college, for it brought a form of recognition that could not have been achieved in any other way. At that time Mount Olive College was the only regionally accredited college in the entire denomination. Property on which to develop a new campus was also acquired but development was delayed in order to give priority to building a strong educational foundation. The fact that meanwhile gifts to the college had

increased substantially may have caused some persons, who did not see the need for another college, to feel that this could diminish the support for the Free Will Baptist Bible College among North Carolina Free Will Baptists.

Furthermore, it became clear in 1954 that Mount Olive was not to become a Bible College. The Board of Directors had determined to establish a liberal arts junior college and the 1954-55 catalog stated this intention. Subsequent decisions confirmed this purpose of the Board, which received final confirmation in a special session of the North Carolina Convention held on the campus on January 31, 1958. The college catalog for 1958-1959 declared as much and further stated that the college was "church related without being narrowly sectarian." Those who set the course for the future of the college were convinced that this type of college would receive the support of the denomination in North Carolina and that students seeking higher education would be better served by such an institution.

Those who chose to identify themselves exclusively with the Bible College and with its philosophy of education began to observe these developments at Mount Olive. At first they tried to suggest that Mount Olive was not a Free Will Baptist College since it did not have the denominational label in its name. Some also suggested that the college ought not to seek private gifts from local citizens who were not Free Will Baptists on the grounds that this could lead to outside control. Some felt that Free Will Baptists could afford to support only one college and priority should be given to the Bible College since it was designed for the training of ministers. They felt that a Bible College education was better suited to the needs of the denomination. Leaders in the National Association had already developed a vision of what a church sponsored college should be and that vision was embodied in the Bible College at Nashville. Any other college sponsored by Free Will Baptists must conform to their philosophy of Christian education. It must have the same or a similar mission and be governed by the same theological perspective and the same standards of social conduct. If the administration and the Board

of Directors of Mount Olive College, along with those who supported the college, wished to have a college with a different philosophy and mission, they could expect to be challenged. The fact that the president of the college and the chairman of the department of religion, Michael Pelt, (beginning in 1957) were graduates of Duke Divinity School was not reassuring to these critics, who felt that Duke was too liberal. But this did not mean that either of these men had any desire to subvert the theological position of the denomination. Both were ordained Free Will Baptist ministers and were subject to the same doctrine and rules of church polity as other clergy in the denomination. Pelt was serving at that time on the Ordaining Council of the Central Conference and as secretary of the North Carolina Convention. If they did not read the same books or use the same theological language as these critics, they were, nonetheless, seeking to be loyal to the faith and heritage of Original Free Will Baptists, believing that students should be encouraged to explore new ideas in a changing world while living out their faith in the God who revealed himself in the person of Jesus Christ.

When President Raper published an article in *The Free Will Baptist* issue for February 19, 1958, entitled "What Makes a College Christian?" he was attempting to clarify the position of the college on this question in view of the fact that "a Christian College for Men and Women" was a frequently printed slogan on materials sent out from the college. His article prompted an immediate response from Leroy Forlines, Professor of Theology at Free Will Baptist Bible College, in the form of a letter to President Raper. In his letter Forlines stated that he was not entirely satisfied with President Raper's characterization of a Christian college in that it did not spell out in detail a clear-cut stand on orthodoxy and whether or not the college was committed to a defense of orthodoxy. He wanted also "to be assured that all on your faculty are orthodox on every point." Because Raper's reply to his letter did not satisfy Forlines, there followed a lengthy correspondence which seemed to accomplish little beyond making clear where each of them stood.² But they did not share the same

view of their responsibility to the denomination in their respective roles and they were looking at what Christian colleges ought to be doing from very different perspectives. While Raper was focusing on the role of a Christian liberal arts college, Forlines saw the issue in terms of the philosophy which undergirded the Free Will Baptist Bible College and which had its roots in the militant-separatist fundamentalist style of such men as Bob Jones, Sr., founder of Bob Jones College, and John R. Rice, long-time editor of *The Sword of the Lord*, a weekly paper which was popular in fundamentalist circles. These fundamentalist spokesmen did not hesitate to attack anyone, including Billy Graham, who did not conform to their style of orthodoxy. Although Forlines had displayed a more charitable spirit in his correspondence than these men in that he was not openly attacking Mount Olive College, he was laying the groundwork for such an attack if he did not receive the desired answers to his questions. Although he could find no basis for a charge against President Raper, in the end he did not get the kind of answers he wanted. The fact that President Raper had said that the college was committed to the Articles of Faith of Original Free Will Baptists was not enough.

While Forlines was seeking information concerning the position of the college in relation to a view of orthodoxy propounded by the most radical fundamentalists and urging the president of the college to go on record in support of that same point of view, others who identified themselves with the Bible College in Nashville were carrying forward what would later become an open warfare against Mount Olive College. Ronald Creech, an alumnus of the Bible College and later chosen as president of the alumni association, wrote to President Raper on March 14, 1958, less than three weeks after Forlines' initial letter. In his letter Creech called attention to a distinct difference in educational philosophy between President Raper and himself as a graduate of the Bible College:

...your philosophy of Christian Education is so different from mine (you believing in the Dewey Philosophy of

expression which produces what is called the thinking mind and I believe in Indoctrination which produces what is called the indoctrinated mind) I have already told my folks what I think about Christian Education and I do not want any confusion among my members. I have enough confusion of other natures.³

At the next meeting of the Board of Directors on May 27, 1958, President Raper in his report made reference to the current criticism directed against the college and added these words:

Our policy must not be one of rebuttal, but a positive statement of our objectives, a constant and humble evaluation of our program, and a full dedication on our part to Mount Olive Junior College. As we vindicate ourselves, our critics will become fewer, but more vocal. We must keep our ears and minds open, but we must not jeopardize our educational program in a futile effort to pacify unfriendly opponents. We shall be guided by truth, not sound and fury.⁴

This strategy for dealing with the opposition to the college was effective in maintaining the support of its friends, but it fell short of convincing its hard-line opponents that their view of the college was wrong. For a time they were content to share their opinions with those whom they felt would be receptive to them. But as they observed the progress being made at the college, they must have concluded that it was time to go public with their accusations against the college lest it should someday become immune to their attacks. Ronald Creech, a Durham pastor and president of the Alumni Association of the Bible College, led the charge when in February 1960 he mailed to Free Will Baptist ministers throughout North Carolina his mimeographed church paper in which he included an article that criticized the policy of the college regarding students attending movies. He wrote:

Did you know that Mount Olive Junior College, a Free Will Baptist owned college at Mount Olive, N.C., looks with favor upon Hollywood movies? They allow their students to attend them if their parents give permission.... Do you know what that means? If a young person comes from a home where the Christian convictions are not too strong and his parents say its O.K., he, as a student of Mount Olive College, can sit and watch a Hollywood movie with college approval....

If every parent of every student at the Bible College were to sign their permission for their children to attend movies, the administration would not allow those students to attend....

Listen, I do not want any Hollywood guzzler to feel at ease around me.... If they like to go to movies, wear shorts, dance, to be T.V. fiends, and then go to church and want the sermon to be real short and along the "you're nice" theme, I don't want them to like me. It insults me if they do like me.⁵

Others soon showed their support of Creech's attack, including J. R. Davidson, a member of the Board of Trustees of the Bible College, whose response to Creech's article was printed in the next issue of Creech's paper, "The Challenger."⁶

A student at Columbia Bible College, Jerry Ballard, had begun publishing "Perception" which with the collaboration and support of a "Board of Associates" was circulated freely among Free Will Baptists. The March-April 1960 issue was devoted almost exclusively to Mount Olive College with a front page headline, "N.C. College Under Fire." The feature article in this issue was written by Carroll Alexander, a recent graduate of the Free Will Baptist Bible College, who had conducted an interview with President Raper. Among other comments he noted his surprise that President Raper had a set of *The Interpreter's Bible* in his library from which he said he had received "help." As if to justify his contempt for this set of commentaries, he added that

they were "written by modernists." "They are well known among fundamentalists as being dangerous books." Concerning the dress code at the college Alexander wrote the following:

Mr. Raper stated that sometimes the girls and boys of Mount Olive Junior College are allowed to play softball on campus with shorts on. A place that is to set the standard of Christian living for future ministers' wives and mothers of our denomination should certainly set the highest.⁷

As the months passed in the spring and summer of 1960, opponents kept up their attack on the College. Most of the critics were recent graduates of the Bible College. Not all of the alumni of the Bible College agreed with these critics. Some were embarrassed by the fact that such open hostility had been displayed, resulting in suspicion and distrust throughout the denomination. The administration of the Bible College took no action to discourage these attacks. On the contrary in the March 1961 issue of the Bible College *Bulletin* Ronald Creech was honored as the "alumni of the month."

The way may have been paved in part for these criticisms of Mount Olive College when at the 1959 session of the National Association a resolution was adopted which provided for the appointment of a commission "to study the menaces of theological liberalism, secularism, worldliness, etc.," ... "that this commission write informative articles in our publications to warn our people of these evils," and "that a report of this commission's work be made to this body at the next session." The next year this commission made its report and recommended that it become a permanent commission of the National Association. The establishment of this commission may have given sanction to the "witchhunt mentality" that characterized much of the opposition to Mount Olive College. It is perhaps significant that Ronald Creech was among the five men appointed to this commission. If one reads the issues of "The Challenger" during the spring and summer of 1960, one could

draw the conclusion that Creech was engaged in a crusade against Mount Olive College by attempting to "demonize" the institution, i.e., making it appear to embody the very evils to which he was opposed. Copies of "The Challenger" were mailed to Free Will Baptist ministers across the denomination in an effort to gain support for this crusade.

Supporters of Mount Olive College (and their numbers were greatly increased by this time) were not to be distracted by these criticisms. They felt strongly that the college had been established on a solid foundation and that the progress made thus far was indicative of an even brighter future. President Raper led the offensive in his report to the North Carolina Convention in September 1960 as he explained the relationship between the college and the Free Will Baptist constituency, especially in North Carolina.

... Original Free Will Baptists are not a sect nor a cult, and neither do we want to be a sect or a cult and find ourselves outside the mainstream of the Christian tradition and divorced from other Christians. Likewise, Mount Olive College is neither a sectarian nor cultic institution. If it were to become such a college, it could not meet the needs of our people. A sectarian college can serve only sect; a cultic college can serve only a cult.

Original Free Will Baptists are a denomination—a branch of the main body of Christians. Mount Olive College is a denominational college which serves Free Will Baptists and others who desire to obtain an education under Christian auspices and Christian personnel. We seek to avoid the bigotry that characterizes sects and cults in order that our Christian witness may be more effective.

As a denominational college, we are loyal to the faith and heritage of Original Free Will Baptists. We believe and teach those truths upon which our denomi-

nation rests....

Christian doctrine cannot be preserved by keeping people in ignorance or denying them the right to think for themselves. The mission of Mount Olive College is to help students to recognize the superiority of Christian truth by encouraging free inquiry in all departments of study.... The only alternative to this philosophy of education would be a sectarian or cultic institution, and that Mount Olive College is determined not to become.⁸

In referring to the sectarian or cultic spirit which some wished to propagate among Free Will Baptists, President Raper was alluding to the type of militant, separatist Fundamentalism which was gaining ground in the denomination, the type whose representatives drew a sharp distinction between those who agreed with their view of orthodoxy and standards of conduct and those who didn't. Those who didn't agree with them were lumped together and branded as "modernists" and "liberals." Such labels as these were repeatedly used by these critics to discredit honorable Christian people and to create doubt and suspicion among humble and God-fearing church members toward their denominational institutions. Their claim to base their actions on biblical injunctions to separate themselves from evil persons while also claiming to love them was hypocritical at best, for their actions toward their brethren betrayed their deep-seated hostility. No amount of appeals to reason and charity would have convinced them to cease their assault on the college. Nothing less than capitulation to their philosophy of what a denominational college should be would have satisfied these critics.

In reference to actions taken by those whose aim was to undermine confidence in the college and, if possible, to weaken it so that it could not survive, Eugene Price, editor of the *Goldsboro News-Argus*, made this comment in an editorial on September 20, 1961: "There are men of small vision, little men, who would wreck what can become a great institution because they have not been able to force their view and their small and narrow interpreta-

tions on the college."

The college administration and faculty in 1960 were committed to building the kind of college that would be worthy of the support of the denomination and the growing number of friends in its locality. During that year the college was visited by a committee from the Southern Association whose responsibility was to evaluate the progress made toward meeting the standards for accreditation. They in turn reported favorably to the Southern Association at its annual meeting in Memphis, Tennessee. On December 1, 1960, President Raper called from Memphis to inform Dean Pelt that "Mount Olive Junior College has been accredited—with no strings attached!" The news was shared with faculty and students during the lunch hour and was received with great enthusiasm.

The Mount Olive Chamber of Commerce and local citizens wanted to show their appreciation for the fact that the college had achieved accreditation in record time. They therefore planned a Mount Olive College Appreciation Day, which was held on May 18, 1961. The program included an address by Governor Terry Sanford who paid tribute to President Raper, the Free Will Baptist Church, and the local community for a job well done.

Disagreement Over Church Government

In a previous chapter we have noted that in its organizational meeting in 1935 the National Association adopted a revised form of the Treatise of the Northern Freewill Baptists but that there was no effort to impose this Treatise on the various state and local organizations making up the National body. The members of the merger committee were aware of the different customs and usages throughout the denomination, including the form of church government recognized by the conferences and the Convention in North Carolina. They made no attempt to nullify those customs and usages which might be in conflict with the Treatise of the National body. Not until the issue of church polity was raised by the conflict involving Edgemont Church in Durham with its pastor

and the Western Conference in North Carolina was there any attempt to persuade the North Carolina Convention and its constituent organizations to reject their long-standing form of church government in favor of the form of church government set forth in the National Treatise.

It is doubtful that there would have been an agreement to organize a National Association in 1935 if every constituent body had been required to abandon its own customs and usages in church government. The record will show that there was no real effort to resolve the differences in church polity before a national organization was effected. Even though there was a Treatise Committee which was asked to prepare a document that would be acceptable to the delegates assembled at the East Nashville Church in Nashville, Tennessee, in November 1935, the report of this committee was given a favorable vote by the delegates without a public reading. As long as the leadership of the National Association was willing to refrain from any involvement in local controversies over church government, there was no problem, but when a party to a local dispute sought to gain support from the National body and succeeded in winning a sympathetic response and precipitous action on the part of the National Association, a real crisis existed.

The local dispute which soon became a denominational issue began when several members of Edgemont Free Will Baptist Church became concerned about what they believed were serious irregularities in doctrine and administration in the church. They reported this to the moderator of the Western Conference and were informed that no action could be taken until formal written charges were submitted. One issue which was causing unrest in the church was the doctrine of "eternal security," embraced by a faction in the church. Since this doctrine was at odds with the doctrine of "perseverance of the saints" as stated in the Articles of Faith in both the National Treatise and the Statement of Faith and Discipline of Original Free Will Baptists of North Carolina, these church members thought it proper to take their complaints to conference officials. Thus they prepared a petition signed by eight

members of the church in which they stated their charges. They also stated that the pastor had threatened to take action against any member who gave information to Conference officials.⁹

The Executive Committee of the Western Conference held a regular meeting on August 12, 1960, at which time the petition signed by certain members of Edgemont Church was presented to the entire committee. Several church members supporting the petition were also present at this meeting. After hearing the formal charges and the statements of members present from Edgemont, the Executive Committee approved a resolution calling for a joint meeting of the Executive Committee and the Board of Ordination of the Western Conference to hear from any members of Edgemont Church who wished to be heard concerning the state of affairs in that church. The resolution also contained a warning to the pastor and the chairman of the official board of the church that "acts of reprisal against members giving information to this committee will not be tolerated." Nevertheless, on Sunday evening, August 14, 1960, at a called business meeting of the church the pastor announced that five members had met with conference officials and asked that these members be silenced and removed from any church offices they held. The congregation voted to comply with his request after which he warned that if these members contacted officials of the conference again, they would be excluded from the church.

The joint meeting of the Executive Committee and the Board of Ordination was held in Durham on August 19, but not at Edgemont since the pastor and some members objected to that. More than thirty members of Edgemont attended this meeting, all of whom supported the complaints previously made. None of the opposing faction attended to refute the charges. The pastor chose not to attend but, according to reports, he and others were sitting in parked cars across the street from the church where the meeting was held. One of the deacons of the church later testified in court that he invited Mr. Creech to come inside but was informed that he (Creech) was interested only in who was attending the meeting. Later testimony in court revealed that ten charges were brought

against Creech and four against what became known as the James Miles faction. Creech was notified that charges had been brought against him and the Miles faction and was advised that he should attend the next joint meeting of the conference committees on August 22 at Pine Level Free Will Baptist Church.

The following Sunday evening, August 21, at another called meeting of Edgemont Church, some of those who had attended the meeting on August 19 were expelled from membership in the church, some were removed from office, some were silenced from any voice or vote in the church and the others were warned against any further contact with conference officials with the threat of expulsion.

None of those against whom charges were brought on August 19 chose to attend the joint meeting on August 22 to receive the charges and to arrange for a hearing. After considering the matter the joint committee approved a motion to revoke Creech's ministerial credentials for one week on condition that he meet with them on August 29. Failure to do so would result in permanent revocation of his ministerial rights and credentials. (This action could not be made public for some time because of a civil suit brought by Creech against the conference officials.)

The meeting scheduled for August 29 was held at Pine Level Church. The pastor and some members of Edgemont and a few ministers of the Western Conference did attend but they were accompanied by four other Free Will Baptist ministers, who were not members of the Western Conference, and Mr. Eugene Boyce, who was not a Free Will Baptist. After a meeting of the joint committee in executive session held in a separate room, they continued their meeting in the church auditorium, at which time the visitors present were identified and were informed that they could remain only with the agreement of the pastor and members of Edgemont. Creech asked that the visitors be allowed to remain for observation but not for discussion, to which the members of the joint committee agreed. The moderator read a copy of a letter which had been sent to Creech containing the charges. When Creech was asked if he or any member of Edgemont would reply

to these charges, he then presented Mr. Boyce and announced that this attorney, Mr. Boyce, would speak for him. After consulting with the joint committee in a private session, the moderator ruled that Mr. Boyce could not speak for the pastor unless he was a member of the Edgemont Church on the grounds that this hearing was a church matter and not a court of law. Mr. Boyce attempted to challenge the committee's decision but was ruled out of order and told to be seated. Since neither Creech nor the members of Edgemont were willing to answer the charges or even agree upon a time and place for a meeting of the accused and the accusers in the presence of the joint committee, the joint committee reentered into executive session. The members of Edgemont and the visitors chose to leave at this time but not before the attorney tried to resume his argument with the moderator. The joint committee voted to annul Creech's ministerial credentials until he agreed to face his accusers in the presence of the committees. They also agreed that those persons who had filed the charges and complaints were acting within their rights and that the members who had been excommunicated or had been removed from offices in the church should be reinstated before a good-faith hearing or mediation on the charges was possible. They set the date for such a hearing on September 9, 1960. Creech was notified of these decisions and was urged to change his mind and agree to cooperate with the joint committee in the interest of an early settlement. The two factions in the church were likewise notified of the committee's offer to mediate the dispute.

A few days later each member of the joint committee received a letter signed by Eugene Boyce and Ronald Creech and dated August 31, 1960. The letter demanded that members of the joint committee renounce and retract the charges contained in the letter which was read at the meeting on August 29 "to and in the hearing of persons not members of the Edgemont Free Will Baptist Church, persons not members of the Western Conference and persons other than Rev. Ronald Creech and his attorneys." (These were persons whom Creech is presumed to have invited to the meeting and whom he asked to be allowed to remain in what

would otherwise have been a closed meeting.)¹⁰ The reason for the demand for a retraction of the statements contained in the letter was the claim that they were libelous and therefore must be expunged from all records, public and private.

The Joint Committee responded to the letter from Creech and his attorney on September 3 and informed them that the charges filed were being dealt with "according to the Statement of Faith and Discipline for Original Free Will Baptists of North Carolina, the Constitution and Bylaws of the Western Conference, and the historic practice of the denomination in dealing with such matters." Their response also stated, "Your demand for retraction cannot be given by our committees inasmuch as the charges on file are not our charges and the accused has failed to face the accusers and answer the charges."¹¹

The Joint Committee met again on September 9 and after reviewing all the charges involving the two factions in the Edgemont Church and the evidence filed in support of the charges, they approved a motion to hold a formal hearing on the charges and to request that both factions in the Edgemont Church attend. The meeting would be closed to all persons except the parties involved. Since permission to conduct this hearing at Edgemont was denied, arrangements were made for the meeting to be held at Kings Chapel Free Will Baptist Church on September 23, 1960. Creech and the Miles faction did not attend the hearing but those who had filed the charges (the Teasley faction) were present. The latter presented further evidence supporting the charges. After hearing all the charges and evidence the Joint Committee went into executive session, made their decisions and recommendations based on the evidence, and then informed both factions of their findings. The joint committee was prepared to make its report to the Western Conference on October 12, 13, 1960.

It appeared from statements made by Creech in three different issues of "The Challenger" (September 12, September 27, October 3) that he and the Miles faction which was supporting Creech, were willing for the Western Conference to act on the findings of the joint committee with authority to make the final decision.

Creech also sent a letter to the members of Edgemont Church, dated October 7, 1960, in which he stated the following:

This Sunday is the last Sunday before the convening of the Western Conference. The important matter of the autonomy of this local church will be decided at that Conference next Wednesday and Thursday, October 12, 13 at Micro, North Carolina, Church. The session begins at 10:00 a.m.¹²

However, when the members of the Executive Committee and the Board of Ordination of the Western Conference arrived at the Micro Church on October 12, they discovered that Creech through his attorney had filed a lawsuit for \$400,000 and had obtained a temporary restraining order which would prevent them from reporting their findings and decisions concerning Creech's status as an Original Free Will Baptist minister or his position as pastor of Edgemont Church. As a result the conference was unable to take any action on the Edgemont dispute other than to approve a vote of confidence in the Executive Committee and Board of Ordination and a motion authorizing them to deal with the matters involved in the restraining order once the restraining order has been lifted or its exact limitation has been clarified.

A show cause hearing was held in Wake County Superior Court on October 24 and Judge Henry A. McKinnon, Jr. handed down his decision, which modified the restraining order, on November 15. The joint committee again requested Creech to meet with them to discuss the charges against him but he refused to do so. They then scheduled a date for a called meeting of the Western Conference. This meeting was held on January 18, 1961, in Wilson, North Carolina, at which time the conference heard a full report of the actions taken by the Joint Committee concerning both Ronald Creech and Edgemont Church. The report concerning Creech included the action of revoking "his ministerial rights and credentials until such time as he agrees to meet the accusers face to face together with this Joint Committee." As a result of this

action he was instructed not to take any action under the guise of a Free Will Baptist minister. The report was adopted by a vote of 98 for and 22 against.¹³

The report concerning Edgemont Church included the actions of the Joint Committee in its efforts to mediate the dispute in the Edgemont Church and its findings of fact as a result of the official hearing conducted at Kings Chapel Free Will Baptist Church on September 23, 1960, (a total of 22 items). The report concluded "... that the Miles faction has departed from the fundamental usages, customs, doctrines, practices, and organization of Original Free Will Baptists of North Carolina and that which did exist in Edgemont Free will Baptist Church before the dissension arose" It also held that the Teasley faction had been loyal to these same usages, customs, doctrines, etc. The joint committee, therefore, recommended that the conference declare the Teasley faction and all other members of the congregation who adhere to these same principles to be the true congregation of Edgemont Free Will Baptist Church. This report was adopted by a vote of 88 for and 10 against.¹⁴

In view of the fact that Ronald Creech and the Miles faction refused to abide by the decisions of the Western Conference, conference officials, acting on behalf of the Western Conference, filed three suits against Creech and the Miles faction in an effort to have the Civil Court of Durham County to vacate Creech from the pulpit at Edgemont and to prevent the Miles faction from holding themselves out as the true congregation.

On June 30, 1961, Superior Court Judge Clawson L. Williams signed a temporary restraining order against Creech, preventing him from conducting himself as a Free Will Baptist minister. A restraining order was also issued against the Miles faction which prevented them from acting as the true congregation. Further, the judge awarded exclusive use of the church property to the Teasley faction. These orders were all conditional, however, based upon the willingness of both Creech and the parties to the dispute in the Edgemont Church to submit to the jurisdiction of the Western Conference. It is clear that if this condition had been met, as

provided for in the Statement of Faith and Discipline for Original Free Will Baptists of North Carolina, pages 47-49 under the heading "The Ministry" and pages 52, 53 under the heading "Independence of Churches," this entire controversy concerning church government could have been resolved.

If one asks why both Creech and the Miles faction refused to adhere to the form of church government practiced for generations among Original Free Will Baptists, it can be said that they asserted their belief in the absolute autonomy of the local church, a view which is shared by some other Baptist groups, but not by Original Free Will Baptists. The term which they used to justify their position was "congregational church government," which they believed to be sanctioned by the Treatise of the National Association. However, the National Treatise had never employed that term in its statements on church government. In the National Treatise in effect at that time the following statement appears on page 47, item 2:

When a minority of a church is aggrieved with the action of the majority, a council may be called by mutual agreement, or requested by the Quarterly Meeting. Such council may be called simply for advice, or as a board of arbitration whose decision shall be final.

In such a case the local church in reality surrenders some of its independence to the district organization (the Quarterly Meeting). In regard to ministers there never was a question as to whether or not they were subject to the discipline of the district body to which they belong and by which they are examined and ordained through the action of a council.

The situation involving the Edgemont controversy was complicated by several factors. One of these was the influence and support of independent preachers, some of whom had been welcomed to the pulpit of Edgemont Church. One ardent supporter was John R. Rice, editor of *The Sword of the Lord*, who when he learned of the action of the Civil Court in Durham County,

published an article (August 25, 1961) under the title, "Denominational Bosses Steal Another Church." More important was the circulation of "The Challenger" edited by Ronald Creech and sent to many ministers throughout the denomination. Through this medium Creech gained sympathy and support for his criticism of Western Conference officials and the actions of the Conference. As an alumnus of the Free Will Baptist Bible College and the recognition given to him by the college and by the alumni association, he was able to win support from some of the leading ministers in the National Association who were also alumni of the Bible College. But the factor which Creech and his supporters were able to exploit to their advantage in the National Association was the signing of an affidavit by fifty-two ministers in North Carolina which stated in part that "Original Free Will Baptists operate under a connectional form of church government." This affidavit was prepared by the attorney for the Western Conference to be used in the civil suits in Durham County against Ronald Creech and the Miles faction of the Edgemont Church.

Superior Court Judge Clawson Williams took into consideration the entire text of this affidavit, along with other information drawn from Original Free Will Baptist history and the Statement of Faith and Discipline for Original Free Will Baptists of North Carolina, and concluded:

That this denomination is historically different from other Baptist denominations in that they have been more connectional in their church government as will be hereinafter set forth in more detail. That between the plaintiff and the defendant there is a connectional form of church government based upon their printed Statement of Faith and Discipline and the customs, practices, and usages of this denomination. That the court further finds that the type of church government is not *necessarily controlling* in this case because of the fact that throughout the history of the plaintiff's existence, the plaintiff (the Western Conference) has exercised authority and

jurisdiction over ministers within its bounds and further ministers have accepted the exercise of the conference's authority until now it is a fundamental part of the customs and practices of the conference. (Order 4736 - This is the order pertaining to Ronald Creech)¹⁵

As a result of these developments Ronald Creech and the Miles faction appealed directly to the Executive Committee of the National Association whose members prepared a statement on the church government issue. This statement was presented to the General Board and was adopted as Item 5 of the report of the General Board to the National Association, meeting on July 11-13, 1961, in Norfolk, Virginia. The statement was an attempt to declare that the National Association had never recognized any other form except a congregational form of church government and that "... no state, district association, or other body affiliated with the National Association of Free Will Baptists has the right to establish its own form of church government by virtue of the Provision and Claim, page 39, section 1, of the National Treatise." The statement also called upon the State Convention of North Carolina "to repudiate any and all forms of connectional church government and reaffirm its position in our historic and established form of congregational church government as set forth in the Treatise of Faith and Practice of the National Association"¹⁶ This the Convention could not do without rejecting its own Statement of Faith and Discipline which it had held long before the National Association was formed and which defined the relationship between the local churches and the conference to which they belonged as well as the relationship of ministers to the conference.

Item 8 in the report of the General Board to the National Association called for an investigation of the men who held offices in the National Association and had signed the affidavit in support of the Western Conference in the case against Ronald Creech and the Miles faction in the Edgemont Church. The matter of this investigation was referred to the Executive Committee which was to meet with these men and report their findings back to the

General Board. But on the closing afternoon of the 1961 session of the National Association this item was amended so as to declare vacant the offices of these men and to elect other men to replace them. The motion to amend was made by Rev. Charles A. Thigpen, Dean of Free Will Baptist Bible College. The men whose offices were declared vacant were Rev. Ralph Lightsey, Rev. R. H. Jackson, Rev. D. W. Hansley, Rev. Burkette Raper, and Rev. Michael Pelt. As a result there was no hearing or investigation that would have provided a forum for discussing the issue. In addition, Rev. M. L. Johnson was not reelected to the General Board from North Carolina and Rev. J. C. Griffin lost his seat on the Board of Publications and Literature in view of the fact that the National Association voted to abolish this board.

The reaction to these developments among the great majority of North Carolina Free Will Baptists was predictable. Articles and editorials appeared in *The Free Will Baptist*, which either condemned or raised serious questions about the fairness of these actions on the part of the National Association. There were also several articles dealing with the meaning of such terms as "a connectional form of church government" and whether this in any way deprived local churches of the right to carry on their own business as they had done in the past. At the same time the Executive Committee of the National Association and those who sought to defend the recent actions of the National body published articles in *Contact*, the voice of the National Association, and in *The Free Will Baptist* in an attempt to justify their position and to renew the request that the North Carolina Convention "repudiate any and all forms of connectional church government." Because there was much confusion about the issues involved in this controversy, Convention leaders held a series of meetings in several churches across eastern North Carolina, seeking to clarify the issues and to inform both ministers and laypersons concerning the implications of these events which had shaken the entire denomination. Since the Edgemont dispute formed the background and was still at the center of this controversy in view of the fact that the cases involving the Western Conference, Ronald Creech,

and the two factions in the Edgemont Church were all pending in court, the Western Conference, through its Executive Committee, published a series of six "Reports" in *The Free Will Baptist*, explaining as fully as possible the course of events surrounding this dispute and the actions taken by the conference. At no time in the past had so much been written and published on any issue involving Free Will Baptists, and this does not take into account the items published in the daily newspapers, especially in Durham, North Carolina.

The feelings of mistrust and estrangement created by events prior to the 1961 session of the National Association were only aggravated by the actions taken by the Executive Committee of that body and the refusal by the moderator to allow a more balanced view of the issues to be heard on the floor. The fact that five ministers from North Carolina had been removed from positions on boards of the National Association because they were found guilty without a hearing in a controversial matter and the fact that this action involved issues of church government which had not been resolved at the level of the National Association was almost certain to lead to irreversible consequences. There was no sign that the North Carolina Convention would heed the request of the National Association to renounce its form of church government and conform to the National Association Treatise and on the other hand there was no serious attempt by the officials of the National Association to seek reconciliation on any other terms. This situation was further complicated by the fact that officials of the National Association attempted to enter the case in the Civil Court in Durham County by filing a brief *amicus curiae* (friend of the court) in support of Ronald Creech and the Miles faction, who had appealed the temporary restraining order of Judge Clawson L. Williams, issued on June 30, 1961. The appeal was to be heard before the North Carolina Supreme Court on November 28, 1961. Upon learning of this action by officials of the National Association, the executive committees of the North Carolina Convention and the Central, Eastern, and Cape Fear Conferences also petitioned to file a similar brief in support of the Western Conference

and the Teasley faction. The Supreme Court disallowed both petitions and the case was heard without either party being able to intervene.

A few Free Will Baptist churches in North Carolina whose pastors supported the recent actions of the National Association were persuaded to incorporate and to take other steps to insist on the principle of the absolute autonomy of the local church. In some cases this happened out of an alleged fear that the conferences wished to "take over" the affairs of the local church. Such was the kind of misrepresentation of events which had occurred in the Edgemont dispute. Some of these churches formed what was known as the Coastal Association of Free Will Baptists and a revived General Conference. It was reported that these new organizations were given encouragement by leaders of the National Association.

As the weeks and months passed, there were several statements presented by representative spokesmen or the executive committees of the National Association and the North Carolina Convention. For example, at the annual session of the Convention in September 1961 a lengthy statement, approved by its Executive Committee and presented to the Convention for its adoption, was read. This statement set forth the position of the Executive Committee on the issue of church government which had been thrust into the foreground by the Edgemont dispute and the subsequent actions of the National Association. It offered several recommendations aimed at bringing about a resolution of the conflict between the Western Conference and Ronald Creech and the Miles faction, including the withdrawal of Creech's lawsuit and the complaints and restraining orders against Creech and the Miles faction. All this was conditioned upon the willingness of the parties to recognize the Statement of Faith and Discipline for Original Free Will Baptists as the basis for adjudicating the dispute. Creech and the Miles faction had repeatedly refused to abide by these terms in the past and it was unlikely that they would at this time.

Since the North Carolina Convention took no action in its

1961 session which would satisfy the request for a repudiation of "any and all forms of connectional church government," there were rumors that in its 1962 session the National Association might refuse to seat delegates from North Carolina or even decide to disfellowship the Convention. In a statement by the Executive Committee of the National Association, published at their request in *Contact* and later in *The Free Will Baptist* the following opinion was expressed:

... Furthermore, we believe that, after all, the standing of the North Carolina State Convention in the National Association is something which it will determine for itself. It seems only logical to us that the National Association will not choose to seat any group which has taken a position contrary to basic Free Will Baptist doctrines, practices, and polity.¹⁷

In view of the controversy then raging it is apparent that there was little chance that basic differences on the issue of church polity would be resolved. Efforts were made to arrange a meeting between officials of the Convention and officials of the National Association to discuss the problems and issues relative to the standing of the Convention in the National body, but these efforts failed.

In a meeting of the Executive Committee of the Convention on January 15, 1962, action was taken to request that members of the Executive Committee and members of standing boards and committees of the Convention meet on February 14, 1962, as a mediation and fact-finding committee to seek to determine with the help of the General Board of the National Association the standing of the Convention with the National Association, and if found not in good standing, to make recommendations to the Convention in a special session or at the next regular session. At this meeting on February 14 a motion was adopted to call a special session of the Convention to be held on March 20, 1962, at the First Free Will Baptist Church in Wilson, North Carolina. The special session

was later postponed to meet on March 29, 1962.

This special session of the convention was an historic event in that it ended a relationship which had begun in 1935 and which had lately been characterized by misunderstanding, confusion, and reprisals. At this session prepared statements and resolutions were adopted by an overwhelming majority of the ministers and delegates present (a total of 434). The statements and recommendations outlined the actions of the National Association and its officials that violated its constitution and the spirit and letter of its own Treatise and which had effectively destroyed any hope of reconciling the differences that existed between the two organizations. The resolutions called for a termination of the relationship with the National Association of Free Will Baptists "as of March 29, 1962, and that this action continue in effect until such time as the National Association in regular session or through its General Board expresses a desire to return to the spirit and stated principles upon which it was founded"

A meeting was held on June 26, 1962, at a Free Will Baptist Church in Raleigh for the purpose of organizing a new State Association of Free Will Baptists. Ministers and delegates at this meeting wanted to continue their affiliation with the National Association. Representatives of the National Association were present, including Dr. L. C. Johnson, president of the Free Will Baptist Bible College, who was the featured speaker that day. The new State Association was seated at the 1962 session of the National Association.

The litigation involving Creech and the two factions in the Edgemont Church again reached the Supreme Court of North Carolina during the Spring term of 1963. The Court dismissed the cases of the *Western Conference vs. Ronald Creech* and the *Teasley faction vs. Ronald Creech* on the grounds that these cases involved ecclesiastical questions that the Court could not judge. The justices granted a partial new trial in the case of the *Western Conference and the Teasley faction vs. the Miles faction* since the case involved a dispute over property, which the Court ruled was in its jurisdiction¹⁸. Finally, as a result of mutual agreement in

this case the church property was awarded to the Teasley faction and the parsonage was awarded to the Miles faction. Creech's lawsuit against the Western Conference officials never came to trial. It was withdrawn as part of a settlement of the Edgemont dispute. The Teasley faction later relocated and became known as the First Free Will Baptist Church of Durham and the Miles faction took the name of Liberty Free Will Baptist Church and still later became an independent congregation.

According to a report of the Executive Committee of the Western Conference, a total of \$16,413.92 had been expended on court costs and legal fees as of October 1969. Rev. M. L. Johnson, former moderator of the Western Conference, who had born a heavy burden in behalf of the Conference and the entire Convention in the Edgemont dispute, died on February 11, 1969, while serving as superintendent of the Free Will Baptist Children's Home.



Top: Former FWB Press Building and Board
 Bottom: FWB Press Foundation Building

Chapter XV

Development of Ministries

The decision on the part of the North Carolina Convention of Original Free Will Baptists to terminate its relationship with the National Association brought to a close a turbulent period in the history of the denomination. For those in leadership positions it had been a painful period, characterized by growing mistrust, ill will, strife, and recriminations. The relationship with the National Association had been a marriage of different traditions and backgrounds that were never truly reconciled. These differences might have been worked out during the early years or even prior to the formation of the National Association, but it was impossible to reach agreement later in the heat of controversy when the minds of many were clouded by the issues at stake. The problem was made more difficult by the fact that a fundamentalist mentality had gained ascendancy in the National Association. This mentality nurtured an absolutist position on almost every point at issue. Thus, on matters of church government, there could be only one correct view of the relationship between a local church and the conference or association to which it belonged, and this despite the fact that such differences were tolerated at the time the National Association was organized. Likewise, in the area of Christian higher education there could only be one type of college which could meet the needs of the denomination. So also in the realm of theology the denominational statement of faith could only be interpreted in accordance with a narrow, separatist view which regarded all the mainline Protestant denominations as sold out to liberalism and modernism.

Foreign Missions

The decision to withdraw from the National Association meant that the North Carolina Convention had to develop additional programs in order to provide avenues of outreach and service on

the part of local churches and their membership. The most urgent of these in 1962 was the launching of a foreign mission program. Ever since its beginning in 1913 the Convention had had a Mission Board which had encouraged interest in taking the gospel to the world. This interest was part of the reason for participation in the General Conference, composed of Free Will Baptist organizations in the southeastern region of the United States. Because of limited support for foreign missions in the General Conference it was not until 1935 that the first missionary was commissioned for work in another country. In that same year the National Association was organized and the Convention enthusiastically supported the program of foreign missions of the National Association until 1962. Unquestionably the desire to develop a world mission program was a primary motive for the organization of the National Association and North Carolina Free Will Baptists wanted to share in this undertaking.

In 1962 it became necessary for the Convention to take action that would set in motion the development of its own mission program. Consequently, the Board of Missions presented a list of goals for the consideration of the Convention in its special session on March 29, 1962. In addition, the Board submitted rules for the management of all mission work sponsored by the Convention, both home and foreign. In its annual report to the Convention in September 1962 the Board of Missions recommended that all mission funds be sent to the Board's address in Ayden, North Carolina, and set a goal of \$75,000 to be raised during the following year. At the mission service on Wednesday night missionaries and missionary candidates were introduced and a special offering was received.

Mexico The year 1963 marked a new beginning in the foreign mission program of the Convention. Since the Mission Board had no program outside of North Carolina, the Mission Board sought avenues through which to begin work in another country. It was decided to establish ties with Arizona-Mexico Mission under the direction of Rev. John B. Elliston. Rev. and Mrs. James Lanier

were sent to Arizona to assist in this work. Support was also provided for a Mexican pastor. Then in May 1963 the Board employed Rev. James E. Timmons as director of missions in the area of Piedras Negras, Mexico and Eagle Pass, Texas. In 1964 the Board agreed to send Miss Barbara Becton to work with the Arizona-Mexico Mission. In addition, they were now providing support for four native missionaries in that area. However, because of unresolved personnel problems that developed in the Arizona-Mexico Mission during 1965, the Board found it necessary to terminate its work in that area.

Meanwhile the work in Northeast Mexico was showing signs of progress under the direction of Rev. Timmons. Several native missionaries were engaged in preaching and establishing mission churches there. Mission churches and mission points were in operation in as many as sixteen locations in 1964. Since the Board was also responsible for giving direction and support to home mission projects in North Carolina, in cooperation with conference mission boards, they were helping to support nine mission pastors at as many locations in 1964. In view of increasing demands on the Board it became necessary to employ a part-time Director-treasurer. Rev. A. B. Bryan, who had been serving on the Board for several years, was chosen for that position. Rev. R. H. Jackson was serving as chairman of the Board.

The cause of foreign missions was dear to the hearts of many Free Will Baptists of North Carolina and they were anxious to see greater results from the efforts and investments made in this outreach of the churches. They wanted to see new fields opened in other countries and more missionary candidates who were willing to invest their lives in this cause. Beginning in 1962 the Wednesday night services of the Convention were devoted to missions. This provided an opportunity for those attending the Convention to meet and to hear personal messages and reports from those who were serving either at home or abroad. In later years these mission services began to draw large crowds. They were also occasions to demonstrate support for missions through gifts from individuals and churches.

In 1969 the Board purchased property for the opening of a Bible School in Quemada, Texas, for the training of native missionaries in Mexico. In 1973 Vance and Mattie Lou Link were sent to Quemada to assist Rev. Timmons, who had opened the Bible Institute and was supervising the work of native preachers and pastors in Mexico. Vance later became the director of the Bible Institute, which provided training for Mexican pastors and workers who studied at the Institute and commuted to their places of service in Mexico. In time churches were organized and registered with the government and new buildings were erected or additions were made to older structures.

The work in Mexico has reached the stage that it no longer requires supervision by an American missionary. Local pastors have developed sufficient organization to operate within the legal structures of the country, which will allow only Mexican citizens to serve as clergymen and will only permit the church to claim ownership of property as long as it is used for the purposes of worship. This is due to exploitation of property and wealth by the Catholic Church in Mexico in the past history of that country.

The Philippines In May, 1967 Rev. Joseph Ingram was employed by the Board as full-time Director-treasurer following the resignation of Rev. A. B. Bryan. The following year Joe and Faye Barrow were approved by the Board and commissioned as missionaries to Rhodesia to serve with the Africa Evangelical Fellowship. They arrived at their destination in early 1969 and labored there until 1972. It was in 1969 that an opportunity arose for Free will Baptists to begin work in the Philippines. Harold and Sandra Jones were commissioned to work with the General Baptists in the Philippines on the island of Mindanao. In 1972 they were re-located to the island of Palawan where work was initiated that year. Following the return of the Joneses to the states in 1975 the Board commissioned Wayne and Deborah King to replace them. Soon thereafter steps were taken to begin development of an indigenous church in the Philippines, one which would be under the control of the Philippine Free Will Baptists

themselves. A national office was established at Puerto Princesa, Palawan. The church was incorporated under the laws of that country so that they could own and dispose of property. Meanwhile a Bible Institute was established at Puerto Princesa for the training of pastors and workers. An ongoing program of evangelism and church planting brought significant results. With the arrival of Fred and Linda Baker in Palawan in 1979 the development of Palawan Bible Institute began in earnest. The Institute has proved to be a valuable resource in the preparation of pastors and workers in the churches and in evangelizing on the island of Palawan and on neighboring islands. Others who were later sent to this field were Willem and Lydia van der Plas and Paul and Teresa Grubbs. Both of these couples served with Fred and Linda Baker at the Institute as well as providing leadership during the transition of this field from one that was directed by American missionaries to one that is now managed by the leadership of Filipino nationals with help from the Director of the Foreign Missions program, Harold Jones.

India The opportunity to become involved in a mission to the teeming population of India resulted from a letter written by Dr. E. M. Lall of Bareilly, India, addressed to Eureka College at Ayden. That college had long since ceased to exist, but the letter was delivered to the Director-treasurer of the Mission Board. Dr. Lall had expressed an interest in working with the Free Will Baptist Church to promote the gospel in his country. After investigation of this inquiry by the Board, support for Dr. Lall and native pastors in India began in 1975. The mission was under the direction of Dr. Lall, who supervised the work of pastors and evangelists. Dr. Lall later visited North Carolina so that his supporters could become better acquainted with him and the work he was supervising. A member of the Board also visited his work in India and in subsequent years the Director-treasurer has included India in his visits to the countries where Free Will Baptists are engaged in carrying out the Great Commission. Dr. Lall has not only supervised the organization and building of

churches but has also started as many as 32 elementary schools with an enrollment above 4,000 pupils, where children can obtain basic learning skills as well as an understanding of the Christian gospel. Oversight is provided by the Mission Board but the work in India was practically indigenous from the beginning in that it was carried on by the native workers. It continues, as do other mission fields, to require substantial support from Mission Board funds.

Two other countries now are hearing the "good news" through a Free Will Baptist witness. The first of these is Nepal, a country bordering on India and noted for its mountainous terrain. Both churches and schools have been established there, including a school for orphans. This work began in August 1991 when native Indian missionaries carried out preaching missions in Nepal with support from the Mission Board. The other country is in Eastern Europe, which until recent years was under communist rule but now is attempting to chart a different political course. However, the influence of the Orthodox church is strong and there is also a Moslem presence. Willem and Lydia van der Plas were sent to this country as a result of contacts with persons there who welcome a Protestant witness. Because the government has not been friendly to churches which were not already present there prior to the recent changes in the political regime, the difficulties of carrying on a continuing Free Will Baptist witness there are great.

Ever since the end of World War II with new nations emerging throughout the world and changes occurring in the political climate in many lands, it has become increasingly difficult for American missionaries to gain admission to these countries as ministers of the gospel unless they are able to provide some service which the leaders and people of these countries feel is needed. In some nations, such as Mexico and India, foreign missionaries cannot serve as clergymen or perform many of the functions that they would ordinarily perform in the United States. Every effort must be made to develop native pastors and leaders or else their mission will not succeed. In these and other nations

unless the native Christians are disciplined and trained to be the church and to carry out the mission of the church, then the cause of the world missions cannot prosper. Ideally the churches will become outposts of the gospel, taking their message to neighboring villages and towns and ultimately to other lands. This has been part of the strategy of the Convention's Foreign Mission Board and it has contributed to the results achieved in most areas where the Board has decided to begin a mission outreach.

In 1995 the Board of Foreign Missions launched a new program which involves sending short-term teams to work in another country. The first such team was sent to Mexico in August 1995 where they conducted Vacation Bible School and a medical clinic as well as repairing and refurbishing church buildings. While engaged in their work, members of the team also developed strong relationships with people of all ages in Mexico. This program will be continued and expanded to other fields in the future.

In recent years the Board of Foreign Missions has sponsored an annual World Missions Conference and Rally at which notable speakers address those attending and emphasis is given to the purpose and strategies of mission endeavors. It also provides opportunity to encourage continuing support for the mission enterprise of the denomination. Another means of garnering support is through the annual telethon sponsored by the Board. Churches and individuals are invited to call in a pledge on a Sunday in March to supplement their regular giving to foreign missions through local church budget appropriations. Churches and individuals also contribute at the Mission Rally held each year during the annual meeting of the Convention of Original Free Will Baptists.

The current director of Foreign Missions is Rev. Harold Jones.

Mount Olive College

Following the withdrawal of the North Carolina Convention

from the National Association in 1962, the Administration of Mount Olive College could focus its attention on the development of this institution without being distracted by the conflict with those who opposed the college. The College Board had first of all approved the purchase of 90 acres of land about one-half mile from the downtown campus. In 1964 construction of facilities on the new campus began and in September 1965 an academic building and a dormitory complex for women were first occupied. With these facilities the college could move most of its operation to the new campus. The downtown campus continued to be used until 1994 when sufficient buildings had been erected on the new campus to accommodate the needs of college personnel as well as the students. As funds for construction became available, new buildings and equipment were added. In 1968 the Moye Library was completed and was named in memory of Rev. and Mrs. J. C. Moye of Snow Hill, North Carolina, who had established the first endowment for the library and had provided leadership in the Convention. A new three-story dormitory for men was completed and occupied in September of 1970. It was named Grantham Hall in 1977 in honor of Mr. and Mrs. Leopold Grantham of New Bern. In 1972 the W. P. Kemp family of Goldsboro gave to the college the property known as Eagles Nest which included a five-acre lake, 50 acres of shaded terrain, several cabins, and a main building suitable for conferences and various other activities.

For years there was a need for a chapel on the new campus. That need was finally met with the building of Rodgers Chapel, which was dedicated on August 3, 1974, to the memory of Mr. Will R. Rodgers. This facility located at the center of the campus, serves as a place of worship, and as a meeting place for special lectures, forums, and some cultural events.

Almost from its beginning many supporters and alumni of the college longed to see it become a senior college. As early as 1974 a study was undertaken to determine the feasibility of such a move. The College Board, after receiving the results of this study, decided that it was not yet the proper time to begin the transition to a four-year program. But on September 12, 1979, the Conven-

tion of Free will Baptists approved this recommendation submitted by the President and the Board of Trustees:

That the Convention affirm its commitment to help provide the leadership and financial resources required to make Mount Olive a fully accredited senior college, and that the Convention endorse the projected time-table set by the College Board of Trustees to add the junior year in 1984 and the senior year in 1985.

Meanwhile plans for the construction of a physical education-athletic complex and convention center were approved by the College Board. This facility, to be known as College Hall, would require the largest outlay of funds for its completion than any building on campus. It was seen as a critical need in order to become accredited as a senior college. Up to this time the college had used a local high school gymnasium for its basketball program. The completion of College Hall would enable the college to enlarge its program of intercollegiate athletics as well as provide a facility for physical education and a recreation and leisure studies program. It would also serve as a convention center for both church and civic groups. The grand opening of College Hall was held on January 7, 1984, and the Convention held its 72nd annual session there on September 26, 27, 1984.

In keeping with the time-table set by the College Board, the first junior class was enrolled in August 1984 and the first baccalaureate degrees, a total of forty-nine, were awarded in May 1986, in addition to seventy-six associate degrees. In December 1986 the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools granted full accreditation to Mount Olive as a senior college. Since that time the college has awarded several hundred baccalaureate degrees to its graduates, many of whom have been admitted to graduate and professional schools while most have taken their place in the world of work, better prepared to make a contribution to their communities, the state, and the nation.

With the addition of junior and senior level classes at the

college it became necessary to offer several programs of study leading to baccalaureate degrees and to add faculty with the necessary credentials to provide instruction in these areas of study. Innovative programs have been developed alongside the traditional liberal arts curriculum in order to meet the needs of students seeking career preparation in certain fields such as Business, Church Ministries, Visual Communications, and Criminal Justice.

Other buildings have been added to the campus in recent years. The first was an administration building, made possible in part by a gift from the W. Roy Pool family of Kinston, North Carolina, and completed in 1991. The Lois K. Murphy Regional Center, which includes a cafeteria and student center, was completed in 1993 and dedicated in honor of Mrs. Lois K. Murphy of Rose Hill, North Carolina. In addition, the building which previously served as the student center was converted into a music building. In 1995 the Galloway Music Library was dedicated, which represented a major gift of Mrs. Josie Galloway Loudenslager in memory of her parents, Carrie Rowland and Jesse R. Galloway of Greene County. The library provides classrooms, studios, technology, and enriched learning resources and will help make it possible for the college to offer a baccalaureate degree program in music, beginning in the 1996-97 academic year. Also, a well-equipped structure, adjoining the music building and built for the visual arts program, was completed in 1995 and was dedicated in memory of the late Jesse H. Laughinghouse of Greenville, North Carolina. These new and renovated buildings have made it possible to locate all departments of the college on the new campus.

One of the most significant developments in the history of the college was the inauguration of a program at Seymour-Johnson Air Force Base in 1978 in cooperation with the Education Office on the base. Students enroll for nine-week terms and can take up to 12 hours during a semester. Regular faculty members as well as adjunct faculty teach courses on the Base and students enrolled there use both library and laboratory facilities on the main campus at Mount Olive. Many on-campus activities are available to these

students, including participation in graduation exercises.

Another program which expands the services of the college to another area was the opening of the New Bern Center in the fall of 1993. The success of this program has led to the opening of another center in Wilmington, North Carolina.

In 1990 Mount Olive College entered the publishing field by establishing the Mount Olive College Press. A Press Board was chosen to give direction to the enterprise and Dr. Pepper Worthington was chosen as editor. A number of publications have been issued thus far, giving voice to scores of writers and poets in eastern North Carolina.

As the college has developed through the years the need for financial support has increased. Free Will Baptists and friends of the college have given generously toward its development and operation. One of the ways by which gifts to the college have been increased is the annual series of dinners held at seventeen locations throughout eastern North Carolina. Since 1963 these annual dinners have provided gift support for the operation of the college totaling more than five million dollars. Funds for development purposes have come largely from individual pledges, special gifts from individuals or businesses, and loans to be repaid over a period of time.

In May 1994 in an address to the faculty Dr. Burkette Raper announced his retirement as president of the college as soon as a successor could be named. He had served the college as president for forty years, the longest current tenure of an American college president. He had earned the respect of the higher education community, of his church, and of people throughout North Carolina. He was honored for his services to the college and to higher education at a dinner held at the college on November 5, 1994.

Meanwhile the college Board had appointed a search committee to recommend candidates for the presidency. In January 1995 the Board met to choose Dr. Raper's successor and later announced its decision to elect Dr. J. William Byrd, who had served as executive vice-president of the college for two and one-half

years prior to his election. A native of Mount Olive, Dr. Byrd had distinguished himself as a leader in higher education in North Carolina. He was installed as the third president of Mount Olive College on January 31, 1995. A more formal inauguration of the new president was held in College Hall on September 30, 1995.

Free Will Baptist Children's Home

Establishing the Children's Home was the first major program undertaken by the North Carolina Convention as early as 1915. The Home was officially opened and the first children admitted on May 23, 1920. By 1964 the Home had served 519 boys and girls. In that same year the superintendent, M. L. Johnson, and the Board of Trustees recommended to the Convention the adoption of a Golden Anniversary Development Program to be completed by May 23, 1970, which would mark the fiftieth anniversary of the opening of the Home. This development program involved the construction and/or replacement of five buildings on the campus and needed repairs on other buildings, along with necessary equipment. During this same period the Home would seek to honor those persons whose vision and sacrifices had made this ministry possible. These included the founders, trustees, administrators, staff, and the children, all of whom had contributed to the success of this endeavor. Most of these goals were realized by 1970, but the addition of new buildings placed a strain on the annual budget of the Home. Meanwhile a new superintendent, Edward Miles, had been chosen by the Board of Trustees following the death of M. L. Johnson in February 1969.

In 1964 Congress had passed the Civil Rights Act which required that institutions receiving federal support must not discriminate against persons on the basis of race, color, or national origin in the provision of any assistance, care, or services. The Board of Trustees had not taken the necessary action to be in compliance with this act until July 23, 1970, at which time they signed an agreement to comply with its provisions. The Board acted in good faith, having considered the issues involved as well

as the fact that the Home depended upon government agencies such as the Department of Social Services to provide certain benefits to the Home.

When the Convention met at St. Mary's Free Will Baptist Church in New Bern on September 16, 17, 1970, the motion to adopt the report of the Children's Home was amended to exclude that portion of the report dealing with the Civil Rights Act. After the motion as amended was carried, the president of the Convention announced that this matter would be taken up in the afternoon session. When it was brought to the floor, the question was asked, "Why did not the Board of the Children's Home bring this matter to the Convention before signing the compliance?" The superintendent and the chairman of the Board contended that they were in order in taking this action and in the manner in which it was done. There was much emotion in the speeches of some who opposed the action of the Board. After heated debate the Convention approved a motion that a special session be called to consider this issue and another that a five-member, fact-finding committee be appointed "to study the pros and cons associated with signing the compliance act." Later in the session the Convention agreed to meet in special session on November 9, 1970, at the First Free Will Baptist Church in Wilson to resolve the issue.

The special session of the Convention was convened as planned. After stating some rules that were to govern the proceedings of this special meeting, the president called upon Rev. Floyd B. Cherry, as chairman, to present the report of the Fact-finding Committee appointed in New Bern. The report was lengthy and very detailed, indicating that the Fact-finding Committee had done its work well. After a period of questions and answers both before and after the lunch hour, the Convention voted to request the Board of Trustees to rescind its action in signing the agreement to comply with the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Although the Board of Trustees had full legal authority to ignore the request of the Convention to rescind its previous action, they did not choose to do so. They proceeded to withdraw their compliance with the Civil Rights Act and thereby closed the door to any services or

assistance available from federal and state sources. Therefore, the full responsibility for meeting the needs of the children in the care of the Home was thrust upon the churches and individuals who supported the Home. Since the Department of Social Services would no longer place children in the Home, the number of children served during the 1970's decreased. Other valuable services provided by government agencies were no longer available to the children. Nevertheless, an effort was made to acquaint the churches with the needs of the children at the Home.

In 1974 the administration of the Home established the Department of Family Services to provide counseling and other assistance to broken families.¹ As a result of concentrated efforts by the Board and the staff, the Home was licensed by the Department of Human Resources of North Carolina in September 1975. The following year a foster homes program was begun in response to the need to care for pre-school age children. During the 1970's an effort was made to accommodate the children in cottages with houseparent couples in order to provide a closer family atmosphere. Whenever possible, the Home began placing children from the same family together so that family ties would remain strong.

During the 1970's it became apparent that most children who would need the services of a children's home were not orphans but were coming from broken homes or were neglected or abused by their parents or others in the family. These children needed special care and if they were to be reunited with their families, help for these families must also be provided. In addition to counseling the child, the Department of Family Services offered guidance and direction to parents in reaching set goals. The primary goal was to help parents solve the problems which had necessitated the placement of the child in the Home so that the child could rejoin his/her family as soon as possible.

After the Free Will Baptist Retirement Homes program was begun in 1974, twenty-five acres at the Children's Home was deeded to the trustees of this ministry on March 31, 1977. The following year the Dawson House, which had been built for staff

housing was renovated with three apartments and leased to Retirement Homes. The idea was to locate these two ministries in close proximity, but this plan did not prove to be satisfactory even though it seemed advantageous to both at that time. The Retirement Homes program was just beginning and the number of children on campus was down with the result that in 1978 the Albemarle building was no longer needed for the children. Therefore, part of this facility was renovated for staff occupancy. In 1979 the Home discontinued its farming operation which had provided work for the boys on campus in earlier years but now was not so essential. The farmland was therefore leased to local farmers.

All of the school-age children at the Home were attending the local public schools. Because some of them were disadvantaged students and needed help to succeed in school, a tutorial program was initiated at the Home. The results of this program were soon apparent as the level of achievement on the part of the children showed significant improvement. Another need among older children at the Home was met when the Preparation for Independent Living program was begun in November 1983. Its purpose was to assist adolescents to learn decision-making, to encourage the development of responsibility for their actions, and to help them acquire the skills needed to function successfully in the larger society. The name of this program was changed to Preparation for Adult Living in 1993.

A very important issue at the Home was finally addressed when the Board voted on November 17, 1982, for the second time to comply with the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The Compliance was signed on December 16 and the following year the Convention voted to endorse this action of the Children's Home Board.

The need for a physical education building at the Home had long been recognized and a planning committee had been appointed to study the matter; however, the Board took no action to proceed with this project until 1987. Their decision was reported to the Convention in 1988 and the facility was completed and dedicated on November 12 of that year. It was named the Whitley Center

in recognition of the first children admitted to the Home in 1920.

In July 1992 the Children's Home opened Genesis House, an emergency shelter in Wilson, North Carolina. The goal of this facility is to provide a safe nurturing environment for girls ages 0-18 on a temporary basis while a permanent plan for each child is being formulated. The focus is to provide personal, medical, and emotional needs until an alternative placement is found. The shelter staff works in cooperation with the Department of Social Services and the legal guardian of each child. Genesis House serves approximately 50 children each year from the Eastern and Piedmont areas of North Carolina.

The Children's Home celebrated its seventy-fifth anniversary on May 18, 1995. Lunch was served to a capacity crowd in Whitley Center, followed by a program featuring special music and the founders' day Message by Rev. Ray Wells, president of the Convention. The Home has served over 1300 children in residential care since it opened in 1920.

The following persons have served as superintendent of the Children's Home since its opening in 1920:

1919-1920 Brother L. B. Dunn
1920-1921 Elder L. H. Wetherington
1921-1929 Brother C. G. Pope
1929-1934 Elder J. R. Bennett
1934-1935 Elder J. W. Alford (Acting)
1935-1940 Reverend M. E. Tyson
1940-1949 Reverend James A. Evans
1949-1951 Dr. Walter M. Croom
1951-1955 Reverend S. A. Smith
1955-1956 Reverend R. H. Jackson
1956-1958 Reverend S. A. Smith
1958-1962 Reverend Wilbert Everton
1962-1969 Reverend M. L. Johnson
1969-1969 Mrs. M. L. Johnson (Acting)
1969-1971 Reverend Edward W. Miles
1971-1972 Reverend Cedric D. Pierce, Jr.

1972-1972 Reverend A. Graham Lane (Acting)
1973-1977 Reverend Sam Weeks
1977-1981 Reverend J. Stewart Humphrey
1981-1983 E. Howard Cayton
1983- Dr. Bobby R. Taylor

The Minister's Program

As early as the nineteenth century there was some interest in providing limited support for retired Free Will Baptist ministers. In 1888 the Conference that included all the churches east of the Wilmington and Weldon Railroad approved a motion that "we look after our old ministers, and take care of them; also, the widows and orphans." Apparently no action was taken on this proposal, but two years later another motion was approved which provided that "this body have a retired list for the worn out preachers, and the different churches contribute for that purpose." Whether or not such a list was compiled and contributions were received, we have no certain knowledge because no record of such action has been preserved. While the sentiment expressed in these motions is commendable, without deliberate and effective planning programs of this nature are seldom initiated.

It was not until 1924 that a resolution was adopted by the North Carolina Convention to establish a Board of Superannuation whose duty was "to look after the financial aid of our infirm, aged, or retired ministers who may be in need of such aid." Later the Bylaws of the Convention stated that this Board "shall seek to provide for our aged, retired, and infirm ministers in some form of a superannuation program; also seek to offer to our active ministers some program whereby they may help to provide for their future security and retirement."² The Board sought contributions from the churches and individuals to create a fund out of which monthly checks could be sent to retired ministers and quarterly checks to ministers' widows. Later the Board recognized the fact that such a plan was totally inadequate to meet the needs of retirees; hence, a program was initiated that would require

participating ministers to contribute on a regular basis to the retirement plan and the money would be invested in order to earn interest until retirement.

In recent years further changes in the Minister's Program, as it is now called, were introduced. A Tax Sheltered Annuity Plan was designed and implemented similar to that available to employees of non-profit organizations. This plan allows the participating minister to make tax-free contributions to the plan and these funds will grow tax sheltered until retirement. The plan is portable so that the minister can move from one church to another without difficulty and the churches are able to participate by matching each dollar contributed by the minister with a twenty-five cent contribution. Each year the minister receives a report of his contributions to the plan along with his account balance. In 1995 the Minister's Program Board approved a proposal which would give ministers participating in the Tax Sheltered Annuity Plan the option of designating a part of their account and annual contributions to be paid into a pooled fund that is invested in mutual funds.

About twenty-five years ago a Minister's Widows Fund was initiated to provide immediate assistance upon the death of a participating minister. When a member of the fund dies, his widow receives the entire proceeds of the fund and a new enrollment is begun at a cost of ten dollars per enrollment. In order to participate in this fund a minister must be in good standing with a member conference of the Convention and must have been enrolled for at least twelve months prior to his death for his widow to receive full benefits.

For the past several years the Minister's Program has sponsored seminars as a means of keeping ministers better informed about changes in the tax laws that affect them. These seminars also provide information concerning financial planning, insurance, retirement, and other matters that may have an impact on members of the clergy. The seminars are held at different locations and are open to all ministers of the denomination.

Recognizing that there are special times in the life of a minister when he may need financial assistance, the Minister's

Program has set aside funds for which a qualified individual may apply. One of these is a post-graduate loan which is available to those who meet certain criteria. This loan is interest free during the time one is engaged in a prescribed course of study, at the end of which the loan becomes due and is payable with interest on a monthly basis. Another is the hardship grant, the purpose of which is to assist needy ministers in the denomination. To qualify one must apply for the grant and demonstrate sufficient need in order to receive assistance. Such grants are funded through contributions from the churches who support the Minister's Program and do not have to be repaid.

An important concern of the Minister's Program is to provide information to ministers and churches alike as they make decisions regarding the minister's compensation. For this reason a Basic Compensation Package has been devised after careful study, including surveys of salary and benefit levels in this denomination and comparisons with the salary structure for ministers of other denominations in this area. The result is a set of recommendations that are offered to the churches as a guide in determining the amount of compensation for the pastor. These recommendations take into account such factors as church size and the minister's education and experience but do not consider the church's ability to pay or the vocational status of the minister. The purpose of such a guide is to help churches recognize the need to provide an adequate level of compensation for pastors so that they can perform their works without undue concern for personal and family needs.

The current director of the Minister's Program is Rev. Donald Fader.

Retirement Homes

The Retirement Homes program was initiated in February 1974 in a meeting of the Board of Trustees of the Children's Home when a motion was approved to appoint a committee to study the feasibility of establishing a retirement home village on

property at the Children's Home. This committee, consisting of A. Graham Lane, Rebecca Davenport, and Sam Weeks, met with the Superannuation Board in March 1974 to present this proposal, seeking their approval. The Board granted its approval and Walter Reynolds was added to the study committee. Then in June the committee met with the Convention's Executive Committee to submit their proposal and the Executive Committee voted its approval. The committee mailed a questionnaire to each Free Will Baptist Church on June 18 which was to be completed by the pastor and returned by July 17. The purpose of the questionnaire was to determine the need for retirement homes and whether or not the churches would support the program if the Convention approved it. The committee decided on the basis of this survey to present a recommendation at the 1974 session of the Convention to establish a Retirement Homes Corporation. This recommendation was approved by the Convention, contingent upon ratification by the conferences representing a majority of the denomination. During the fall of 1974 six conferences ratified the action taken by the Convention, followed by the Piedmont Conference in 1975. Formal action was taken to establish the Retirement Homes when the Children's Home Board and the Superannuation Board met jointly to elect officers of the corporation. Billy Dilday was elected chairman, Rebecca Davenport as secretary, and Sam Weeks as director/treasurer. The officers applied for a charter which was issued by the State of North Carolina on February 6, 1975. On July 1 the Convention's Executive Committee approved the Constitution and Bylaws of the Retirement Homes.

For several years the Retirement Homes Board was composed of the members of the Children's Home Board and the Superannuation Board but in September 1982 the Convention approved a recommendation that a separate board be elected, representing each of the member conferences of the Convention.

Since the Retirement Homes had its beginning at the Children's Home and plans were made to use a portion of the property at that location, a deed was granted for twenty-five acres of land on which to build apartments. The first duplex apartment was

completed and dedicated in August 1976 and was subsequently occupied by Miss Bonnie Farmer, who had served at the Children's Home for many years. A second apartment was rented to Mrs. Thelma Rulli. In 1978 the Dawson House on the Children's Home campus was renovated with three apartments and leased to the Retirement Homes.

Although original plans called for apartment-type living on property adjacent to the Children's Home campus, this arrangement was not satisfactory to all who wished to participate in the Retirement Homes program. Therefore, a change in policy was made to allow for community-based homes or apartments. In April 1984 a home was purchased in Ayden and rented to Mrs. Rose Bowen. Since that time other properties have been purchased or rented for the use of retirees who qualify for participation in this ministry. Some qualified retirees who choose to continue living in their own home may receive cash payments to cover certain expenses.

Because of this change in policy which allows for community-based homes or apartments, the properties which were earlier acquired from the Children's Home have been released back to that institution. Support for the Retirement Homes ministry is provided by residents of the homes and by Free Will Baptist churches and individuals.

Rev. Walter Sutton served as director of this ministry until August 1996.

Church Finance Association

This ministry had its beginning in 1940 in response to the need to pay off the indebtedness of a local church which might otherwise have lost its property during the "great depression." The Church Finance Association has since been recognized as a denominational agency whose purpose is to make loans to Free Will Baptist churches and institutions affiliated with the Convention. Such loans enable these churches to borrow funds with which to build or expand their facilities at a cost that is usually

less than loans available through other lending institutions.

The association is a non-profit membership corporation owned by Original Free Will Baptist organizations and individuals that have purchased membership certificates at a cost of \$25 each. A membership certificate gives to the owner the right to participate in the Association's annual meeting with voting privileges. Another way by which individuals, churches, and church organizations can support this ministry is by depositing available funds in the Association. These funds earn interest at current market rates on such deposits. In its annual report for the year ending December 31, 1994, the Association reported a total membership of 3,319; total deposits of \$864,654; and total loans to churches and institutions amounting to \$1,428,076. Contributions to the Association may be made by individuals and churches and endowments may be established for the benefit of denominational institutions.

The immediate past director of the Church Finance Association was Rev. Walter Reynolds and the current director is Rev. Donald Fader.

Free Will Baptist Press Foundation

The Free Will Baptist paper had its beginning in 1873 when the General Conference approved a resolution which called for the beginning of a "church organ." The paper was published at various locations largely determined by its editors, until 1895 when the printing establishment was moved to Ayden. Although it has occupied several locations within the town, its present location is on Lee Street in Ayden where a ten acre site was acquired, more adequate facilities were constructed, and the Free Will Baptist Press began its operations in January 1968.

Meanwhile the Free will Baptist Press Foundation was incorporated as a non-profit corporation with member organizations rather than stockholders. These members included churches and church organizations, all of which are Original Free Will Baptists. No longer could individuals purchase memberships in the

Free Will Baptist Press. In this way the Press was able to clarify its status as a non-profit organization. A board of directors, nine in number, is elected by the members present at annual meetings and this board formulates policy by which the Press operates.

In 1966 the Press began a new venture with the opening of a bookstore in Smithfield, North Carolina. In later years bookstores were established in Wilson, Kinston, and New Bern in addition to the one located in the Press building at Ayden. These bookstores proved to be successful outlets for the sale of literature and merchandize handled by the Free Will Baptist Press Foundation.

Since its beginning the Press has played a vital role in the life of the entire denomination. It has assumed responsibility for the editing and publishing of religious literature for the denomination, including material for Sunday schools, woman's auxiliaries, and youth programs on a regular schedule. In addition, tracts, pamphlets, and books have been published to meet the needs of various publics. An immensely important service has been rendered by the publication of *The Free Will Baptist* in that it has given voice to hundreds of persons whose writings have appeared on its pages through the years. It has also been a medium through which the activities and the ministries of the denomination are given coverage for the benefit of its readers. During most of its history the paper was published weekly but since January 1985 it has been published monthly in an attractive format.

Beyond serving the denomination which brought it into being, The Free Will Baptist Press Foundation has been an institution dedicated to serving Christ and the church universal by proclaiming the "good news" through the printed page. The current director of this ministry is Mr. Clifford Gray and the editor is Ms. Tracy A. McCoy.

Cragmont Assembly

The original property of Cragmont Assembly near Black

Mountain, North Carolina, was purchased in 1945 and the first summer camping program was begun at that location in 1946. Formerly a private sanitorium, this property consisted of 115 acres on which stood a three-story building and a few smaller structures. With minor repairs these facilities were suitable for developing a summer retreat that would serve the denomination for years to come. It soon became clear that other buildings and equipment were needed to accommodate the variety of groups that were to be served by Cragmont. Within a few years an eight unit motel, a gym, and two small renovated dwellings were added. Then in 1971 two dormitory complexes were built, followed by the construction of a kitchen-dining hall in 1974. In 1978 the Cragmont Board launched the construction of the new Main Building and Chapel at a cost of \$383,334.73. This project represented a bold step forward toward providing a more attractive and convenient facility for the hundreds of people of all ages who delighted in spending a few days each year at this site in the Blue Ridge Mountains. In order to meet the cost of this new building Free Will Baptists were urged to contribute an amount equal to the estimated construction cost of one square foot—\$25.00. Other means of paying off the indebtedness through pledges and club memberships were later devised. The 1979 camping season was opened in the new facility after much work by the staff and volunteer help. Over 1300 people attended summer camps and retreats that year and the numbers have continued to grow as weekend retreats for church groups and other special recreational and inspirational retreats have been added to the schedule at Cragmont.

The purpose of Cragmont Assembly has been stated by one of its most ardent supporters in three words: Inspiration, Instruction, and Recreation. All conferences held at Cragmont are designed with this purpose in mind, with a variety of programs and activities to implement this purpose. Today there are six youth conferences, two women's conferences, and one minister's conference held each summer and several weekends are scheduled for local church groups, women, and special interest groups

throughout the remainder of the year. Vacationers are also invited to use Cragmont for overnight lodging as space is available.

In 1995 Cragmont Assembly celebrated its Year of Jubilee. The idea for this celebration arose in 1990 as a means of garnering support for paying off the debt on the Main Building. Individuals and churches were asked to pledge \$1,000 to be paid at the rate of \$200 per year. Although the campaign to reach a goal of 400 pledges fell short of that number, the Cragmont Board was able to announce in its annual report to the Convention in 1995 that Cragmont Assembly was now debt free. A special service of thanksgiving and celebration of the half century of service to the denomination rendered by Cragmont was held on the second day of the 1995 session of the Convention.

The current directors of this ministry are Rev. John Williams and his wife Arlinda.

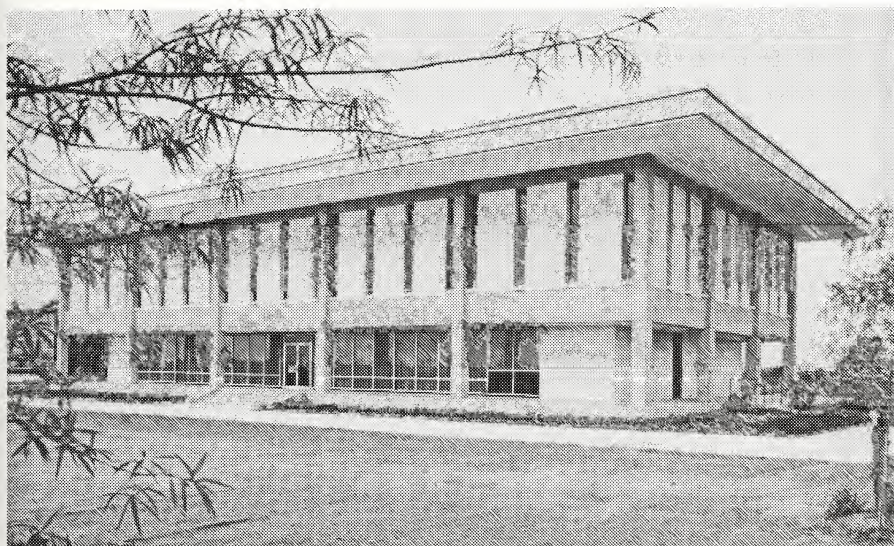
Home Missions and Evangelism

Until 1972 the functions of this ministry were assumed by the Board of Missions. In that year a constitutional provision approved by the Convention provided for a separate board which was designated as the Board of Church Extension. The following year further changes in the constitution were made which renamed both boards: the Board of Foreign Missions and the Board of Home Missions and Church Extension. The duties of both boards were also spelled out in more detail in the Bylaws. Then in 1985 after much discussion on the floor the Convention agreed to change the name of the Board of Home Missions and Church Extension to the Board of Home Missions and Evangelism.

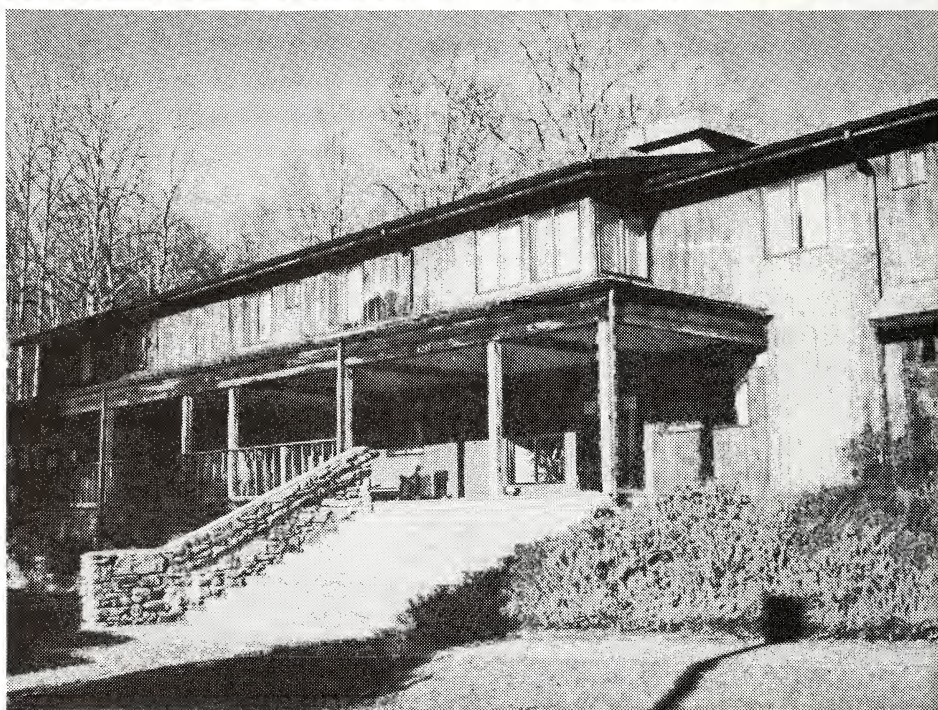
In the 1970's the primary focus of this ministry was the support of mission churches in several locations throughout Eastern North Carolina, at times in cooperation with conference mission boards. In the 1980's additional programs were added to this ministry, including a summer camp for the deaf at Eagles Nest and the oversight of scouting programs in local Free Will Baptist churches. Also, this ministry joined hands with the General

Baptists in providing assistance to the H'Mong people who fled from Laos at the end of the Vietnam War, many of whom came to the United States. This involves working with the Lao Evangelical Church in evangelism, church planting, and youth work. The Board has also provided some assistance to churches which are located in areas where there is opportunity to minister to Hispanic migrants through worship services and Scripture distribution.

This ministry conducts all-night prayer services at different locations in January of each year; provides training in church growth, faith sharing, and discipleship; conducts the "Night of Evangelism" prior to the Annual Convention; and sponsors the Touching Lives Corp, which involves laypersons in Home Mission work for limited periods of time. The current director of Home Missions is Rev. David C. Hansley.



Top: Original Building, Mount Olive College
Bottom: Moyer Library, Mount Olive College



Top: Original Building, Cragmont Assembly
Bottom: New Building, Cragmont Assembly

Chapter XVI

Other Convention Programs

The Constitution and Bylaws of the Convention provide for programs and functions other than those ministries which have been described in the last chapter. These functions are carried out by officers, committees, boards, and commissions elected by the Convention in accordance with the Bylaws. The Executive Committee, for example, acts on behalf of the Convention when the latter is not in session. Like all other boards and commissions, it makes an annual report of its actions to the Convention, which is subject to the Convention's approval. One of its functions is the employment of the Convention's Executive Administrator, formerly referred to as the General Secretary or Promotional Director. Because of insufficient funds to support this office the president or the recording secretary of the Convention for several years was asked to provide limited service in that capacity. Recognizing the need for more expanded services in that office, the Executive Committee employed David C. Hansley in the spring of 1968 who served as General Secretary less than one year. His contract was terminated because of insufficient funds to support his services in that position. It was not until July 1989 that the Executive Committee again felt it was time to employ a General Secretary. Rev. C. H. Overman was chosen to serve in that capacity on a half-time basis. Four years later in September 1993 he was officially installed as full-time Executive Administrator of the Convention and served until October 1, 1995. His successor, Rev. Scott Sowers, was installed in that office at the annual session of the Convention in September 1995.

The Executive Committee has also taken the initiative in developing fraternal relations with other denominations of similar size that share a common doctrinal heritage. One of these is the General Association of General Baptists, a group which developed out of the same background as Original Free Will Baptists. Beginning in 1968 the two denominations have each sent fraternal

delegates to the annual meetings of the other. On February 11, 1969, representatives of both denominations met in Knoxville, Tennessee, where they agreed to form a fellowship between the two groups. They drew up a "Statement of Purpose" which was subsequently adopted by the Convention's Executive Committee and approved by the Convention at its annual session in 1969. Among other considerations this statement provided the basis for ministers of the two groups to move from one to the other without surrendering their credentials. It also encouraged "a working relationship between the boards and enterprises of the two bodies in areas of mutual concern."¹

The headquarters of this denomination is located in Poplar Bluff, Missouri, and they sponsor Oakland City College in Oakland City, Indiana, as well as other denominational programs.

Another denomination with which the Convention has developed a fraternal relationship is the Churches of God, General Conference, which first invited fraternal delegates from the Convention to attend their triennial meeting in June 1986. Michael Pelt and John B. Narron were chosen by the Executive Committee to represent the Convention at this meeting of the Churches of God, General Conference, in session at Findlay College, Findlay, Ohio, during the week of June 9-13, 1986. The entire visit was both an inspiration and a learning experience. This and subsequent exchanges of fraternal delegates has led to a growing relationship between the two denominations that has benefitted both. Prior to this a meeting between the Fraternal Relations Committee of the Churches of God and the Convention's Executive Committee was held at Cragmont Assembly for the purpose of sharing information about the two denominations. The founder of the Churches of God was John Winebrenner, whose revivalistic emphasis and methods led to a break with the German Reformed Church in Pennsylvania in 1825. The end result was the birth of an Arminian Baptist-type denomination. The legal headquarters of the Churches of God, General Conference, is located in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, but their administrative offices are at Findlay, Ohio, where the denomination also sponsors Findlay College and Winebrenner

Theological Seminary. The denomination's periodical, *The Church Advocate*, is likewise published at Findlay.

A sister denomination which had its beginning following the Civil War and the emancipation of former slaves is today known as the Middle Eastern District Original Free Will Baptist Annual Conference of America, Inc. This body meets annually in November at the L. N. Forbes Tabernacle in Wilson, North Carolina. It embraces churches in several eastern states and is under the leadership of Bishop L. N. Forbes, who has served as president for a number of years. Bishop Forbes and other ministers have represented this body as fraternal delegates at annual sessions of the Convention for more than a decade. They have also welcomed ministers from the Convention at their annual meetings in Wilson. Bishop Forbes has been greeted enthusiastically as a platform guest and speaker at the Convention and at Mount Olive College. Officials of the Convention have also been featured on the program at their Annual Conference in Wilson.

In various ways these contacts with other church groups and the relationships thus engendered have been enlightening and have provided a wider fellowship for Original Free Will Baptists. Because the denomination has not sought affiliation with any of the larger Protestant interdenominational organizations, such as the Baptist World Alliance, such relations as those described above help to offset the feeling of isolation that might otherwise occur.²

Following the passage of a resolution at the Convention in 1974, the Free Will Baptist Press took the initiative in 1975 in publishing the *Yearbook for Original Free Will Baptists of North Carolina*, a compilation of directories and minutes of the Convention and its member conferences and the minutes of the Woman's Auxiliary Convention, the League Convention, and the Sunday School Convention. Then in 1985 the Executive Committee of the Convention of Original Free Will Baptists assumed this responsibility. As a result of this effort a vast amount of current information about the entire denomination was made available on an annual basis. The cost of this publication is shared by each of the organizations and ministries of the denomination while the benefits

of such a publication are obvious to all. When the Convention employed a General Secretary in 1989, the publication of the *Yearbook* became one of his duties. Copies of the *Yearbook* are distributed each year to the ministers and churches affiliated with the Convention.

A resolution was presented by Dr. W. Burkette Raper at the 1976 session of the Convention calling for an examination of the present and former Articles of Faith of Original Free Will Baptists for the purpose of recommending "any appropriate revisions" in the official *Statement of Faith and Discipline*. At its next meeting the Executive Committee agreed to call a special study committee meeting on February 15, 1977, to organize the committee to revise this important document. Since 1977 was the 250th anniversary of the founding of the first Arminian (Free Will) Baptist Church in North Carolina, much thought had been given to the English General Baptist heritage of the denomination and the faith and practice belonging to that heritage. For this reason the revised document would reflect the influence of the General Baptist heritage. It was agreed at this meeting that each conference would choose two representatives to serve on the revision committee. The revision committee held its first meeting on March 1, 1977, in the Free Will Baptist Historical Room in Moye Library at Mount Olive College. Following an examination of the various confessions of faith published throughout the history of this denomination, the committee adopted two of these, the Confession of 1660 and the Former Articles of 1812, as the basis for the present revision. When the Revision Committee had completed its work, they reported to the Study Committee on February 15, 1979. The final document was presented to the Convention in 1981 after which it was adopted by the required two-thirds of the conferences belonging to the Convention. It was then authorized to be printed and made available for distribution.

For many years the officers of the Convention and its various ministries carried on their work without the benefit of a central headquarters. During those years the Executive Committee quite often chose to meet at the Free Will Baptist Press building in

Ayden and when there was a part-time Promotional Secretary, he was at one time provided office space there. Some time after the Press had occupied its new facilities located in Ayden, its Board of Directors agreed to lease space in that building to the Executive Committee of the Convention to provide offices and a meeting room for the directors of ministries who chose to locate there and for the Executive Administrator once that person was employed. It is generally agreed that this decision to establish a permanent headquarters for the denomination was an important step forward in the progress of the Convention.

Beginning in the fall of 1984 the Executive Committee decided to work on a plan that would provide direction for the future of the Convention. Some of the needs that were identified included the following: (1) Identity (a better understanding of the denomination in light of its history, its distinctive beliefs, and its service to the world), (2) Revitalization of the churches, conferences, and enterprises of the denomination, (3) Growth (setting goals for the growth of the denomination, and (4) Unification (promoting unity and cooperation among the churches, conferences, and enterprises of the denomination). At the 1985 session of the Convention the Executive Committee presented a five-year plan for meeting these needs. Each of the ministries reporting to the Convention was asked to develop five-year goals and to plan strategies for meeting these goals. Themes for the annual sessions of the Convention for the next five years were adopted by the Executive Committee and presented to the Convention for its approval. These themes emphasized the role of the Church as Servant and were featured at the 1986 through 1990 sessions. In 1990 the Executive Committee chose as an overall theme for the next five years, "Hear the Word of the Lord." Each year in the five-year cycle the Convention program focused on a particular development of this theme, with the first year centering on "Christian Commitment." In 1995 the Executive Administrator announced still another five-year theme, "The Call to Renewal." The aim of all this was to give direction and motivation to the churches that make up the Convention.

In spite of these efforts to provide a spiritual focus for the denomination and to channel the energies of its member churches and ministers there was a growing recognition that all was not well. The fact that numerical growth had all but ceased in many of the churches and that the active membership of the churches, as well as the ministry was aging were but symptoms of deeper problems facing the churches. At a time when denominational loyalties were weakening among Protestants generally, too many Original Free Will Baptists seemed to be taking less seriously their commitment to the local church and to the denomination at large. This often resulted in a decline in Sunday school and church attendance and in support for the church's benevolent work. It also led to indifference toward reaching others for Christ and adding new members to the church. Complicating the problem was the fact that whereas the pastor's role had greatly increased over the past few decades, in many instances his preparation for that expanded role had not kept pace with the rising level of education among the laity. In some churches an independent attitude was developing with regard to conference and convention obligations and the energy and resources of the members were devoted mainly to fulfilling their own needs or wishes. In an atmosphere of this kind it is difficult to engender enthusiasm for the denomination and its programs.³

Because of these and other concerns the Convention, through the office of the Executive Administrator, launched "Project Solution" in January 1993. Its stated purpose was to examine, scrutinize, and analyze every phase of the work of the denomination. The project would be a self-study involving leaders and people throughout the denomination. A Task Force Committee under the chairmanship of the Executive Administrator was chosen to provide leadership for the project. Their work involves gathering information through surveys, questionnaires, and evaluations after which they will coordinate the results and report their findings. Then the project will move into its second phase—proposing solutions that will enable the denomination to fulfill its purposes. The Task Force Committee has developed a

denominational Mission Statement as well as a five-year plan. These were adopted at the 1995 session of the Convention. The results of this committee's work and the implementation of their proposals could have important consequences for the future of the denomination.

Commission on Chaplains

When the North Carolina Convention withdrew from the National Association of Free Will Baptists in 1962, it became necessary to establish a Commission on Chaplains to accommodate any current chaplains who wished to be affiliated with the Convention and any future candidates for the chaplaincy in the armed forces of the United States as well as civilian chaplaincies. The first active chaplain who requested endorsement by the Commission was Air Force Chaplain John B. Narron. He was soon followed by Army Chaplain Dan Rivers. Both of these men served until retirement. Others are currently serving in both military and civilian chaplaincies.

Because of the size of the denomination and the recent downsizing of the military, the number of possible endorsements for the military chaplaincy has remained quite small. The National Guard and the Reserve Forces have provided some opportunities. Volunteer chaplaincies, such as the Civil Air Patrol and some local hospitals, have provided openings for others to minister.

The Convention was a member of the General Commission on Chaplains and Armed Forces Personnel, a national organization of endorsing agencies, as long as that organization existed and has since cooperated with other denominations in supporting military chaplains and other armed forces personnel in their service to the nation.

The Historical Commission

Like other boards and commissions the members of this board are elected by the Convention. Their role in the past has been

primarily to call attention to the importance of preserving documents and records that reflect the history of the denomination. Without such records it is impossible to give an accurate account of the past.

During the last decades of the nineteenth century a few individuals tried to give some account of the origin of Free Will Baptists in North Carolina and the development of the denomination in later times. This would not have happened without having access to written records either by Free Will Baptists themselves or by others who gathered information about the early history of this people.

During the first half of the twentieth century other individuals gathered private collections of historical material. Some of them were members of the Commission and others simply had a deep interest in preserving such material on the denomination's history. It was not until 1954 that the Commission recommended setting up "a historical library at Mount Allen College" to make available these documents and records for the use of researchers or anyone who had an interest in Free Will Baptist history. This recommendation was implemented in 1957, largely through the initiative of Daniel W. Fagg, Jr., who was then serving as dean of Mount Olive Jr. College, with the support of both the president and the librarian of the college. The Collection grew as a result of the enthusiastic support of Free Will Baptists who brought hundreds of items to the Collection and encouraged others to do likewise. Among those who labored hardest to develop the Collection in the early years was Mrs. Cora Lee Garriss Spivey, Mrs. Anna Hill, and George Stevenson. Many others have since brought materials to add to the Collection either from their own private collections or from their local churches. Mr. Gary Barefoot, who became librarian of the College in 1965, catalogued the Collection and has since served as curator. This Collection is recognized as the depository for materials, papers, and publications of all kinds relating to the history of the denomination.

The Historical Commission has encouraged the addition of materials to the Collection as well as the use of its resources for

historical research. Free Will Baptist students, pastors, lay persons, and even strangers from afar have made use of these resources through the years.

Camp Vandemere

During the summer of 1966 Rev. Ralph Sumner, as pastor of Arapahoe Church, began holding day camp on the Neuse River near Arapahoe. The following summer several other churches in that area joined him. In 1968 the churches of the Fifth Union of the Eastern Conference came together for a weekend retreat at the Presbyterian Camp near Morehead City. It was at this retreat that the first offering was received for what was to become Camp Vandemere.

Seeing a need for a retreat center on or near the coast, the Eastern Conference appointed a committee to locate suitable property in Carteret or Pamlico counties. The property at Vandemere was soon afterward acquired and a board of directors chosen by the Conference. During the first year of operation two weeks of camp were held with the campers living in tents since there were no other sleeping accommodations.

Today the camp owns a forty acre site with a family sleeping lodge, manager's quarters, an open air, all purpose building, an above ground pool, a commercial type slide, canoes, a recreation set, and a fishing pier. Each summer during the last several years the camp has been host to more than 200 young people. In addition several churches and small groups have used the facilities at Camp Vandemere for retreats.

A representative of Camp Vandemere reports to the Convention at each annual session though this facility is owned by the Eastern Conference. It has a board of directors that includes some members from other conferences. All Free Will Baptists are invited to use the facilities of Camp Vandemere and to give it their support.

Carolina Bible Institute

Although this school is not sponsored by the Convention of Original Free Will Baptists, it has been allowed to present a report at the annual sessions of the Convention for a number of years.

The Institute was first established by Rev. Floyd B. Cherry while he was serving as pastor of Daniels Chapel Church in order to meet the needs of some ministers for a study of the Bible. When he was called to serve as pastor of Pine Level Church, that church agreed for him to operate the Institute. In 1975 he and a group of men arranged to incorporate the school under the name of Carolina Bible Institute. Later a suitable building was erected in the town of Pine Level.

The primary purpose of the Institute was to provide courses of study for men with families who wished to meet certain requirements for ordination to the ministry. Laymen were also admitted to these courses. Correspondence courses were provided for those who wished to take these courses in a home study program. A diploma in Bible was awarded to those who completed this curriculum. A seminary department was added in 1987. Students completing the seminary curriculum receive a Th.G. degree. At present there are no facilities for resident students and only night classes or courses by correspondence are offered.

The current catalog states that the Institute is not owned by any church or denomination. It is governed by a self-perpetuating Board of Trustees; that is, the Board elects its own members. At present those serving on the Board are active members of Free Will Baptist churches. Officials of the Institute feel that it is and has been of service to the denomination. The current president of the Institute is Rev. Joseph Ingram.

Auxiliary Organizations

During the past century as the scope of activities in local Free Will Baptist churches has increased, new organizations have developed in order to offer support and guidance for these activities. Among the first such local organized activities was the Sunday school which focused on teaching the Bible. Later came

the women's organizations, called Ladies Aid Societies or Mission Societies, followed by the Free Will Baptist League, which emphasized church training. In time there were district and state organizations of these local groups which held quarterly or annual meetings for the purpose of sharing progress reports, new ideas, and common interests. The ministers also felt a need to form conference fellowship meetings and a state ministers' association. These state organizations came to be regarded as auxiliary organizations of the Convention of Churches and were given opportunity to report at the annual sessions of the Convention. Each of them has contributed in its own sphere of activity to the vitality of the denomination as a whole as well as providing opportunities for service to numerous persons who have served as officers and leaders in these organizations, the list of which would be much too long to give.

Woman's Auxiliary Convention

As noted in an earlier chapter this organization was begun in 1927, following the organization of local and district meetings in earlier years. In addition to providing women a voice in the work of the denomination, its main purposes were to create among them an interest in missions while encouraging a deeper devotional life and involvement in Christian service.⁴

The North Carolina Woman's Auxiliary Convention, which meets annually in May, is made up of seven district conventions formed in each of the seven conferences in the state. These district organizations meet twice each year in the spring and fall. Officers for both the state and district conventions are elected for two-year terms. In addition to their regular duties they endeavor to inform the membership concerning the programs and goals of their respective organizations as well as the needs of the various denominational ministries. Each local auxiliary is requested to give a certain amount each year to each of these ministries. Both the state and district organizations have field secretaries who maintain contacts with local auxiliaries in order to encourage active

participation in district and state programs and to strengthen the local membership.

Local auxiliaries are expected to have special programs each year at Easter, Thanksgiving, and Christmas. They are also encouraged to hold three study courses each year on various topics in order to keep members informed and aware of their Christian obligations. Auxiliaries that have large, active memberships usually divide into circles in order to enhance individual participation and to provide closer fellowship. These circles usually meet in the homes of members. Each local auxiliary is expected to use the publication entitled "Devotion" in their monthly meetings. Members are encouraged to give their tithes to the church and each auxiliary is asked to pay an annual fee to their district and state convention. Members are likewise encouraged to perform some deed of kindness each month in their community. Each local auxiliary should have a youth chairman to work with the youth organizations in the local church—the YFA, AFC, and cherubs—to see that they are provided with quality leaders and effective programs.

There are certain ongoing responsibilities of the Women's Auxiliary Convention officers. One of these is to oversee the publication of literature for the local auxiliaries and for the youth organizations. Writers for "Devotion" and for children's literature must be enlisted and their work must be edited and compiled each year before it is published by the Free Will Baptist Press. A "Manual of Methods", which had been in use by the Woman's Auxiliary for many years, was completely revised in 1981. Another program, initiated by the Convention in 1936, is the Anna Phillips Student Loan Fund, which was established to provide assistance to Free Will Baptist students enrolled in higher education. In recent years the administration of this fund has been assigned to Mount Olive College and an annual report of its activity is given at the Convention. A third program is the sponsorship of the annual women's conferences at Cragmont Assembly. Participation in this event has grown in recent years, making it necessary to have two conferences each summer and a

weekend retreat in April. Also, the Woman's Auxiliary has for many years sponsored two youth conferences at Cragmont each summer—one for YFA's and one for AFC's. They have likewise sponsored an annual Youth Convention for the past several years, held in May on the campus of Mount Olive College.

In order to give recognition for outstanding service the State Convention has for many years presented to one of its most active members a Life Membership Award in a special ceremony at each annual meeting. Similar awards are given in recognition of outstanding work at the district level and in local auxiliaries.

Throughout most of the twentieth century women have made a far greater contribution to the mission of the Original Free Will Baptist Church than was possible in earlier times. Their impact has been felt in all areas of church life and work and no small amount of their enthusiasm and devotion has been exhibited through the woman's auxiliaries.

Sunday School Convention

The North Carolina Sunday School Convention was organized at the annual Convention of Original Free Will Baptist Churches held at Little Rock Church, Lucama, North Carolina, in September 1940. Rev. Raymond Sasser served as the first president. The purpose of this organization was to promote, coordinate, and provide standards for the work of Sunday schools as the primary expression of the teaching ministry of the churches. It was understood that this organization would function as an auxiliary body of the Convention of Churches and for this reason a report of its progress was made to the Convention of Churches each year. Early in its history a Four Point Program was adopted to promote and carry out the purposes of the organization. A Workers' Institute was held annually to train officers and teachers, and standards for local Sunday schools were developed. A Field Secretary was available to visit local churches to conduct training sessions for officers and teachers and to encourage the building of standard Sunday schools. The Sunday School Convention was also

the primary instigator for a summer camp, having approved a plan for raising funds to build such a camp at their annual meeting in 1941. This plan was finally realized in the acquisition of Cragmont Assembly in 1945.

The Sunday School Convention met annually from 1941 until 1989. During these annual sessions the program included workshops to provide instruction and to promote new ideas and methods in the work of local Sunday schools. Many officers and teachers of local Sunday schools received valuable training through these annual institutes.

For many years Rev. L. E. Ballard served as Field Secretary of the Convention. Through his writings and his visits to churches as well as other contacts with pastors and superintendents, he rendered yeoman service to the Convention and to local Sunday schools. Following his retirement the Convention then employed Rev. Bass Mitchell in 1984, who served until the summer of 1990.

In 1989 the bylaws of the Convention of Churches were amended to establish a Sunday School Board, consisting of nine members, who would assume the responsibilities that in the past had been carried by the Sunday School Convention.⁵ The Board has conducted annual institutes in March of each year and continues to sponsor the annual General Youth Conferences at Cragmont Assembly. Attendance at the annual institutes has seen a marked increase since 1993. At the latest institute on March 2, 1996, about 450 adults and children were in attendance. These institutes have provided fresh ideas as well as hands-on material which can be immediately used in local Sunday schools. In addition, the members of the Board submit regular articles to *The Free Will Baptist* centering on Christian education in the local church. They have also by invitation conducted workshops and shared information in local church settings.

Several years ago the Sunday School Convention initiated a teacher/superintendent certification program in order to provide minimum standards for Sunday school leaders and teachers. In April 1994 a revised program of certification was adopted by the Sunday School Board and certification workshops are being held

in order to implement this program.

For many years the Convention sponsored an annual Pastor/Superintendent's Banquet with a program focusing on Sunday school work. In recent years this has also been an occasion to honor a "Teacher of the Year." The Board continues the tradition of an annual banquet as well as honoring Teachers of the Year from local churches.

In 1995 Mary Dudley, present chair of the Board, traveled to California with the Home Missions and Evangelism Board, where she taught classes on Sunday school work as part of a ministry to the H'mong people. Members of the present Sunday School Board are working vigorously to provide a service to the denomination at large which will enable Free Will Baptists to see that Christian nurture is the responsibility of the whole church rather than small groups of people who gather for classes only on Sunday mornings. Board members are willing to prepare themselves for the task of equipping others to become more effective teachers and Sunday school workers. They are in the process of establishing a Learning Resource Center at the denominational headquarters to provide assistance to those involved in Christian education in local churches. They are also working closely with the Executive Administrator and the Free Will Baptist Press to establish a Literature Committee which will coordinate Free Will Baptist publications promoting Christian education.

State League Convention

This organization has a long history which deserves fuller treatment than we are able to provide. Its vitality in earlier years was linked to the many active leagues in local Free Will Baptist churches. As the number of such leagues decreased, so did participation in the League Convention with the result that in 1977 only ten leagues reported at the annual meeting. Despite efforts on the part of faithful leaders, this declining participation was not checked.

The League Convention has continued to report annually to

the Convention of Churches and to sponsor such events as the Christian Cadet Conference at Cragmont Assembly and an annual Sword Drill for Juniors and Intermediates at its annual meetings. The organization supports Cragmont Assembly and elects representatives to the Cragmont Board as do the other sponsoring bodies. In 1995 the Convention met at Mount Olive College during the annual State Youth Convention.

North Carolina Ministerial Association

There was an organization of Free Will Baptist ministers in North Carolina as early as 1895. In that year a Ministers' Meeting was organized among ministers of the Union Conference. It met each year prior to the convening of the Conference and was likely an occasion for members to share common interests and concerns as well as an opportunity for prayer, worship, and spiritual uplift.

A few years after the organization of the North Carolina Convention we learn of certain proposals presented to the Convention after they had been approved by the Ministers' Association. In the absence of any records of their meetings we cannot assume that this association met on a regular basis. That it was still in existence in 1941 may be seen in the fact that at the annual meeting of the Sunday School Convention it was proposed that the Ministers' Organization cooperate with the Sunday School Convention, the League Convention, and the Woman's Auxiliary Convention in promoting a plan for purchasing land and building suitable facilities for a retreat center. The Ministerial Association was among those organizations that sponsored an institute at Cragmont Assembly in the summer of 1946. Each year thereafter the association has sponsored the Minister's Conference, at which time its annual meeting is held as part of a program that includes worship, preaching, teaching, and time for recreation and relaxation.

The Association also has a mid-year meeting in February. Its Executive Committee meets periodically to plan annual events and to consider other matters related to the work of the Association.

Layman's League Convention

During the nineteenth century men occupied the positions of leadership in Free Will Baptists churches and in most churches women and children were a silent majority. That situation changed somewhat in the twentieth century with the result that some men felt the need for an organization that would stimulate and encourage active participation on the part of men in all aspects of the life and work of the local church. In some churches a men's fellowship or brotherhood was organized to meet that need. These local organizations, however, lacked the stimulus of a larger fellowship and the opportunity for service to the denomination at large.

It was at the 1962 session of the Convention of Churches that the first step was taken to give support to these local men's organizations. A committee of three was appointed to prepare a handbook and program materials to be used by local men's organizations. This committee was composed of Rev. Charles Sapp, Ross Phipps, and F. McCoy Tripp. The following year the constitution of the convention was amended to provide for a men's organization to be known as the Layman's League and this organization was to be represented by a committee of three to be elected by the Convention. A later constitutional change replaced this committee of three with the Layman's League Board, consisting of twelve members, in order to give broader representation.

As a result of the rapid increase in the number of Layman's Leagues, many felt that the time had come to form a statewide organization. Therefore, a meeting of representatives from five districts—the Albemarle, Cape Fear, Central, Eastern, and Western—was held in Rodgers Chapel at Mount Olive College on May 15, 1982, to organize the Layman's League Convention. Rev. C. L. Patrick, who had been an advisor to local leagues, was the main platform speaker. Rev. David C. Hansley, who was serving as president of the Convention of Churches, presided over the election of officers and the installation service which followed. Those elected were: Paul Beaman, president; J. T. Wilson, vice-

president; Floyd Newsome, secretary; and Ray Clark, treasurer.

Afterwards a new Layman's League Handbook was prepared, printed, and distributed, which serves as a guide for the organization of local leagues and offers suggestions for avenues of service in the local church and in the denomination. It also contains suggested constitutions for local and district organizations as well as a constitution for the state Layman's League Convention.

In addition to the many services rendered in local church and community settings the Layman's Leagues have cooperated at the state level in sponsoring events such as the gospel music festival held for a number of years at Eagles Nest and they have funded several projects for denominational ministries. Each year they have sponsored a weekend spiritual retreat for men of the church. In summary this organization has done much to promote good stewardship on the part of Free Will Baptist men.

Convention Officers Since 1913

| Year | Location of Meeting | President | Secretary | Treasurer |
|------|--------------------------------------|------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| 1913 | Bailey, Nash County | D. B. Sasser | E. T. Phillips | C. K. Dunn |
| 1914 | St. Mary's, New Bern, Craven County | D. B. Sasser | E. T. Phillips | C. K. Dunn |
| 1915 | Shady Grove, Sampson County | D. B. Sasser | E. T. Phillips | C. K. Dunn |
| 1916 | Arthur, Pitt County | S. H. Styron | D. B. Sasser | C. K. Dunn |
| 1917 | Pine Level, Johnston County | S. H. Styron | E. T. Phillips | C. K. Dunn |
| 1918 | Reedy Branch, Pitt County | S. H. Styron | E. T. Phillips | C. K. Dunn |
| 1919 | White Hill, Beaufort County | S. H. Styron | E. T. Phillips | C. K. Dunn |
| 1920 | Rains X Roads, Johnston County | S. H. Styron | E. T. Phillips | C. K. Dunn |
| 1921 | Black Jack, Pitt County | S. H. Styron | E. T. Phillips | C. K. Dunn |
| 1922 | Little Rock, Wilson County | S. H. Styron | E. T. Phillips | C. K. Dunn |
| 1923 | Reedy Branch, Pitt County | C. M. Johnson | E. T. Phillips | C. K. Dunn |
| 1924 | Shady Grove, Sampson County | S. H. Styron | E. T. Phillips | C. K. Dunn |
| 1925 | Black Jack, Pitt County | S. H. Styron | E. T. Phillips | C. K. Dunn |
| 1926 | Pine Level, Johnston County | S. H. Styron | E. T. Phillips | C. K. Dunn |
| 1927 | Shady Grove, Sampson County | S. H. Styron | E. T. Phillips | J. W. Alford |
| 1928 | Little Rock, Wilson County | S. H. Styron | E. T. Phillips | W. C. Fields |
| 1929 | Pleasant Grove, Wayne County | S. H. Styron | E. T. Phillips | W. C. Fields |
| 1930 | White Oak, Bladen County | J. W. Alford | E. T. Phillips | W. C. Fields |
| 1931 | Oak Grove, Craven County | S. H. Styron | E. T. Phillips | W. C. Fields |
| 1932 | Marsh Swamp, Wilson County | S. H. Styron | E. T. Phillips | W. C. Fields |
| 1933 | Union Chapel, Beaufort County | S. H. Styron | E. T. Phillips | W. C. Fields |
| 1934 | Micro, Johnston County | S. H. Styron | E. T. Phillips | W. C. Fields |
| 1935 | Piney Grove, Pitt County | S. H. Styron | E. T. Phillips | W. B. Crumpler |
| 1936 | Hopewell, Johnston County | Henry Melvin | E. T. Phillips | W. B. Crumpler |
| 1937 | St. Mary's, Wilson County | Henry Melvin | E. T. Phillips | W. B. Crumpler |
| 1938 | Snow Hill, Duplin County | Henry Melvin | E. T. Phillips | W. B. Crumpler |
| 1939 | Little Creek, Greene County | M. E. Tyson | E. T. Phillips | W. B. Crumpler |
| 1940 | Little Rock, Wilson County | M. E. Tyson | J. W. Alford | W. B. Crumpler |
| 1941 | Free Union, Greene County | J. C. Griffin | E. T. Phillips | W. B. Crumpler |
| 1942 | Malachi's Chapel, Tyrrell County | J. C. Griffin | J. R. Bennett | W. B. Crumpler |
| 1943 | Middlesex, Nash County | D. W. Alexander | R. N. Hinnant | R. W. Mallard |
| 1944 | Reedy Branch, Pitt County | J. R. Bennett | R. N. Hinnant | R. W. Mallard |
| 1945 | Kenly, Johnston County | J. R. Bennett | R. N. Hinnant | R. W. Mallard |
| 1946 | Black Jack, Pitt County | M. L. Johnson | R. N. Hinnant | R. W. Mallard |
| 1947 | Shady Grove, Sampson County | M. L. Johnson | R. N. Hinnant | R. W. Mallard |
| 1948 | Hull Road, Greene County | J. W. Alford | R. N. Hinnant | R. W. Mallard |
| 1949 | Orphanage Chapel, Nash County | J. W. Alford | R. N. Hinnant | R. W. Mallard |
| 1950 | Rains Crossroads, Johnston County | L. B. Manning | R. N. Hinnant | R. W. Mallard |
| 1951 | White Oak, Bladen County | L. B. Manning | R. N. Hinnant | R. W. Mallard |
| 1952 | Goshen, Belmont, Gaston County | Lloyd Vernon | R. N. Hinnant | R. W. Mallard |
| 1953 | Marsh Swamp, Wilson County | Lloyd Vernon | R. N. Hinnant | R. W. Mallard |
| 1954 | Orphanage Chapel, Nash County | Lloyd Vernon | R. N. Hinnant | R. W. Mallard |
| 1955 | Kenly, Johnston County | D. W. Alexander | R. N. Hinnant | R. W. Mallard |
| 1956 | Beaver Dam, Columbus County | D. W. Alexander | R. N. Hinnant | R. W. Mallard |
| 1957 | Cramerton, Gaston County | N. B. Barrow | Michael Pelt | R. W. Mallard |
| 1958 | Mount Olive College, Wayne County | N. B. Barrow | Michael Pelt | R. W. Mallard |
| 1959 | Mount Olive College, Wayne County | N. B. Barrow | Michael Pelt | R. W. Mallard |
| 1960 | Elm Grove, Pitt County | N. B. Barrow | Michael Pelt | R. W. Mallard |
| 1961 | Legion Building, Mount Olive, Wayne | S. A. Smith | Michael Pelt | R. W. Mallard |
| 1962 | Orphanage Chapel, Nash County | S. A. Smith | C. H. Overman | R. W. Mallard |
| 1963 | Raleigh Memorial Auditorium, Wake | C. L. Patrick | C. H. Overman | R. W. Mallard |
| 1964 | Legion Building, Kinston, Lenoir | C. L. Patrick | C. H. Overman | R. W. Mallard |
| 1965 | Orphanage Chapel, Nash County | Walter Reynolds | C. H. Overman | R. W. Mallard |
| 1966 | Armory, Mount Olive, Wayne County | Walter Reynolds | C. H. Overman | R. W. Mallard |
| 1967 | Moose Building, Kinston, Lenoir | J. W. Everton | C. H. Overman | R. W. Mallard |
| 1968 | Armory, Mount Olive, Wayne County | J. W. Everton | C. H. Overman | R. W. Mallard |
| 1969 | Children's Home, Nash County | Willis Wilson | Tommy Manning | G. B. Frazelle |
| 1970 | St. Mary's, New Bern Craven County | Willis Wilson | Tommy Manning | G. G. Frazelle |
| 1971 | Daniels Chapel, Wilson County | C. F. Bowen | Cedric Pierce | Lena C. Walston |
| 1972 | Black Jack, Pitt County | C. F. Bowen | Cedric Pierce | Lena C. Walston |
| 1973 | Kenan Memorial Auditorium, Duplin | F. B. Cherry | Cedric Pierce | Lena C. Walston |
| 1974 | Kenan Memorial Auditorium, Duplin | F. B. Cherry | Cedric Pierce | Lena C. Walston |
| 1975 | Legion Building, Wilson County | Robert May | Gary Barefoot | Lena C. Walston |
| 1976 | Mount Olive College, Wayne County | Robert May | Gary Barefoot | Lena C. Walston |
| 1977 | Kenan Memorial Auditorium, Duplin | Robert May | D. C. Hansley | Lena C. Walston |
| 1978 | Memorial Auditorium, Cumberland | David C. Hansley | Gary M. Bailey | Lena C. Walston |
| 1979 | Lenoir Community College, Lenoir | David C. Hansley | Gary M. Bailey | Lena C. Walston |
| 1980 | Memorial Auditorium, Cumberland | David C. Hansley | Gary M. Bailey | Lena C. Walston |
| 1981 | Lenoir Community College, Lenoir | David C. Hansley | Gary M. Bailey | Lena C. Walston |
| 1982 | Lenoir Community College, Lenoir | Gary M. Bailey | W. Scott Sowers | George Demmitt |
| 1983 | Everett Chapel, Clayton, Wake County | Gary M. Bailey | W. Scott Sowers | Ronnie Hobgood |

| Year | Location of Meeting | President | Secretary | Treasurer |
|------|-----------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|----------------|
| 1984 | College Hall, Mount Olive College | Gary M. Bailey | W. Scott Sowers | Ronnie Hobgood |
| 1985 | College Hall, Mount Olive College | Gary M. Bailey | W. Scott Sowers | Ronnie Hobgood |
| 1986 | College Hall, Mount Olive College | DeWayne Eakes | G. C. Bryan | Ronnie Hobgood |
| 1987 | College Hall, Mount Olive College | DeWayne Eakes | G. C. Bryan | J. B. Narron |
| 1988 | College Hall, Mount Olive College | DeWayne Eakes | G. C. Bryan | J. B. Narron |
| 1989 | College Hall, Mount Olive College | DeWayne Eakes | G. C. Bryan | J. B. Narron |
| 1990 | College Hall, Mount Olive College | W. Scott Sowers | G. C. Bryan | Leon Harris |
| 1991 | College Hall, Mount Olive College | W. Scott Sowers | Bruce Dudley | Leon Harris |
| 1992 | College Hall, Mount Olive College | W. Scott Sowers | Bruce Dudley | Leon Harris |
| 1993 | College Hall, Mount Olive College | W. Scott Sowers | Bruce Dudley | Ronnie Hobgood |
| 1994 | College Hall, Mount Olive College | Ray Wells | Bruce Dudley | Ronnie Hobgood |
| 1995 | College Hall, Mount Olive College | Ray Wells | Bruce Dudley | Ronnie Hobgood |



C. H. Overman
Former Executive Administrator



W. Scott Sowers
Current Executive Administrator

Endnotes

Chapter 1

1. B. R. White, *The English Separatist Tradition*, London: Oxford University Press, 1971, pp. 116-120.
2. A. C. Underwood, *A History of the English Baptists*, London, The Carey Kingsgate Press, 1947, p. 34.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 35 f.
4. W. T. Whitley, *The Works of John Smyth*, Vol. I, p. xciii, cited in A. C. Underwood, *History*, p. 37.
5. Underwood, *op. cit.*, p. 58.
6. William L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, Philadelphia: The Judson Press, 1959, p. 174 ff.
7. The full text of the Confession of 1660 is included as Appendix A in *The Articles of Faith and Principles of Church Government for Original Free Will Baptists (of the English General Baptist Heritage)*, Ayden, NC: Free Will Baptist Press Foundation, n.d.
8. Underwood, *op. cit.*, p. 90.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 91.
10. A passage from this sermon is quoted in Underwood, p. 91.
11. Underwood, *op. cit.*, p. 122.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 119 ff.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 111.
14. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, p. 320 f.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 138.
16. Cited by Adam Taylor, *The History of the English General Baptists*, I, p. 451.

Chapter II

1. The author wishes to acknowledge his indebtedness to an article on Benjamin Laker, written by George Stevenson and published in the *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*, Vol. 4, edited by William S. Powell, Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991, pp. 3-5.
2. This information was made available to the author by George Stevenson after the publication of his article on Benjamin Laker in *DNCB*.
3. Stevenson, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

4. Minutes of the General Association as preserved in W. T. Whitley, ed., *Minutes of the General Assembly of General Baptist Churches in England, with Kindred Records*, Vol. I, London: Kingsgate Press, p. 75.
5. David Benedict, *A General History of the Baptist Denomination in America*, Vol. II, Boston, 1813, p. 13.
6. For information in this and the following paragraphs the author is indebted to a brief article in *Transcriptions of the Baptist Historical Society*, Vol. IV, London: Baptist Union Publication Department, pp. 55-57. In addition, he has read the manuscript of the minutes of the Kent Association for the years 1708-1728, which are in the care of Dr. Williams' Library in London, in order to obtain a more complete account of their interest in the Virginia mission.
7. Benedict, *op. cit.*, p. 24.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 25.
9. Cited in W. T. Whitley, "General Baptists in Carolina and Virginia," *Crozer Quarterly*, XIII [Jan., 1936], pp. 26-27.
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Ibid.*
12. Morgan Edwards, "Materials Towards a History of Baptists in the Province of Virginia" (Furman University Library), Vol. III of Edwards' *Materials*, 1772, p. 21; cited by Benedict, Vol. II, p. 24.
13. This information was cited in a letter to the author from George Stevenson, dated June 23, 1992.
14. *Ibid.*

Chapter III

1. The author acknowledges his indebtedness to a manuscript article on Paul Palmer by George Stevenson which appears also in *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*, Vol. 5, edited by William S. Powell, Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1994, pp. 10-13.
2. William L. Saunders, ed. *The Colonial Records of North Carolina* (Raleigh, 1886), Vol. p. 406, II, p. 410 f., 416.
3. Stevenson, *DNCB*, Vol. 5, p. 10.
4. Cf. William F. Davidson, *The Free Will Baptists in America, 1727- 1984* (Nashville: Randall House Publications, 1985), p. 40.
5. Stevenson, personal letter to the author, dated June 23, 1992.
6. The only contemporary reference to this congregation that has survived is this entry in Comer's diary. See C. Edwin Barrows, ed., *The Diary of John Comer*, Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1892, p. 84.

7. George W. Paschal, *History of North Carolina Baptists*, Vol. I., Raleigh: The General Board, N. C. Baptist State Convention, 1930, p. 140 f.
8. Personal letter to the author from George Stevenson, dated June 23, 1992.
9. Paschal, *op. cit.*, p. 141.
10. Personal letter to the author from George Stevenson, dated June 23, 1992.
11. *Ibid.* A copy of this map was sent to the author by George Stevenson on June 23, 1992.
12. Taken from a photocopy of the original which is in University of North Carolina Library at Chapel Hill. The photocopy is in the Free Will Baptist Collection at Mount Olive College.
13. Stevenson, *DNCB*, Vol. 5, p. 11.
14. *Ibid.*
15. An account of the history of this church, now called Sater's Baptist Church, is found in Dawn F. Thomas, *The Green Spring Valley: Its History and Heritage*, Vol. I, Maryland Historical Society, 1978, pp. 158-162.
16. Stevenson, *DNCB*, Vol. 5, p. 12.
17. Saunders, *Colonial Records*, III., p. 48.
18. The information in this paragraph is based on an article which appeared in the *Journal of the South Carolina Baptist Society*, Vol. VI (Nov. 1980). The article features a letter sent by a group of General Baptists to the Second Baptist Church of Newport, Rhode Island, asking that an able and qualified minister be sent to serve them as pastor. The text of that letter as well as the text of a letter written by the pastor and co-pastor of the Newport Church is included with an introduction and explanatory notes by Robert Gardner, professor of Religion at Shorter College in Rome, Georgia.
19. Edwards, *South Carolina Notebook* (Crozer MS), pp. 21-23. See also Leah Townsend, *South Carolina Baptists, 1670-1805*, Florence, SC: The Florence Printing Co., 1935, p. 55.
20. *The Somerset (Maryland) Court Judicials, 1734-1736*. Cited in Davidson, *op. cit.*, p. 41. f.
21. Edwards, "Tour of Rev. Morgan Edwards of Pennsylvania to the American Baptists in North Carolina in 1772-73": p. 29.
22. Stevenson, *DNCB*, Vol. 5, p. 12.
23. *Ibid.*
24. *Ibid.* See also Paschal, *History*, pp. 186 ff.
25. *Ibid.*

26. "Petition from the Protestant Dissenters of Bay and Neuse Rivers," Colonial Court Records, North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh.
27. J. R. B. Hathaway, *North Carolina Historical and Genealogical Register*, Vol. III., p. 475.
28. Stevenson, *DNCB*, Vol. 5, p. 12 f.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 13.
30. *Ibid.* For more information concerning Palmer's family, see this entry in *DNCB*, Vol. 5, p. 13.
31. Morgan Edwards, "Tour," p. 38.
32. George Stevenson, "Surginer, Williams," *DNCB*, Vol. 5, edited by William S. Powell, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994, p. 476-478. See especially p. 477.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 477.
34. Lemuel Burkitt and Jesse Read, *A Concise History of the Kehukee Baptist Association from Its Original Rise to the Present Time*, Halifax, NC, 1803, p. 28.
35. S. J. Wheeler, *History of the Baptist Church Worshipping at Parker's Meeting House Called Meherrin*, Raleigh: printed at the Recorder Office, 1847, p. 5 f.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
37. Paschal, *op. cit.*, p. 141.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 168.
39. Edwards, "Tour," p. 31.
40. In a letter to the author dated June 23, 1992, Stevenson writes, "Dr. Paschal's Joseph, son of Joseph, was under the age of 16 when his father died in 1749/50, giving the boy a birth year of not prior to 1735. It is Joseph Parker, son of Peter Parker, I think, who married Sarah Welch; this couple were living in Bertie County at the time Joseph Parker was ministering in the southern Roanoke River valley in the late 1740s."
41. Stevenson, "Parker, Joseph," *Dictionary of North Carolina Baptists*, Vol. 5, pp. 19-22.
42. *Ibid.*, p. 20.
43. *Ibid.*
44. J. H. Foote in his *Sketches of North Carolina* quotes the journal of Rev. Hugh McAden, a Presbyterian minister, who preached at Upper Fishing Creek at the Baptist yearly meeting 1955.
45. Stevenson, *DNCB*, Vol. 5, p. 20.
46. Edwards, "Tour," p. 32.
47. A typewritten copy of this deed (Craven County Deeds, Deed Book 10) is in the Historical Collection at Mount Olive College. The property

deeded to Parker was then in Craven County, later ceded to Pitt County, but is now a part of Greene County.

48. See R. K. Hearn, "Origin of the Free Will Baptist Church in North Carolina, included in D. B. Montgomery, *General Baptist History*, Evansville: Courier Company, 1882, pp. 148-178.

Chapter IV

1. See Harry E. Fosdick, *Great Voices of the Reformation*, New York: Random House, Inc., 1952, pp. 514-517.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 517.
3. Paschal, *op. cit.*, p. 205.
4. Edwards, "Materials" (Furman MS) IV, p. 126; Paschal, *op. cit.*, p. 210 f. It is ironic that Gano chose a passage from Acts 19:15 which ascribes the words of his text to an evil spirit.
5. Morgan Edwards reports that Upper Fishing Creek Church was reconstituted on December 6, 1755, by Miller and Vanhorn, which would make this the first church to be reconstituted. See Edwards, "Tour," p. 25.
6. Burkitt and Read, *op. cit.*, pp. 171-172.
7. Paschal, *op. cit.*, pp. 220-222.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 221.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 212.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 216.
11. Burkitt and Read, *op. cit.*, pp. 42 f.
12. David Benedict, *A General History of the Baptist Denomination in America and Other Parts of the World*, New York: Lewis Colby and Company, 1848, p. 98.
13. Paschal, *op. cit.*, p. 219.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 220.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 220-222.
16. Burkitt and Read, *op. cit.*, p. 38.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 208 f.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 28.
19. Wheeler, *op. cit.*, p. 7.
20. *Ibid.*

Chapter V

1. Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972, p. 292 f.

2. Paschal, *op. cit.*, p. 306. See also William L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Foundations in the South*, Nashville: Broadman Press, 1961, pp. 21-59.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 299 f.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 300, note 13.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 302 f.
6. Burkitt and Read, *op. cit.*, pp. 94, 98.
7. Paschal, *op. cit.*, p. 475.
8. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, p. 356.
9. "A letter of Valediction on Leaving Virginia, 1791," quoted in Sidney E. Ahlstrom, *op. cit.*, p. 322, from *The Writings of the Late John Leland*, ed. Louise F. Green (New York, 1845), p. 172.
10. Winthrop S. Hudson, *Religion in America*, 4th ed., New York: MacMillan Publishing Company, p. 114.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 120.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 169, quoting Robert Baird from the pages of the *Princeton Review*, 22 (1850), p. 204.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 75.
14. Robert M. Calhoun, "Christian Church," *Encyclopedia of Religion in the South*, edited by Samuel S. Hill, Mercer University Press, 1984, p. 148 f.
15. Ahlstrom, *op. cit.*, pp. 447-449.

Chapter VI

1. The earliest account of his life is provided by John Buzzell, *The Life of Elder Benjamin Randall*, Limerick, ME: Hobbs, Woodman & Co., 1827.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 9.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 21.
4. Norman Allen Baxter, *History of the Free Will Baptists: A Study in New England Separatism*, Rochester, NY: American Baptist Historical Society, 1957, p. 8.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 15.
6. Buzzell, *op. cit.*, p. 51.
7. *Ibid.* p. 53.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 72.
9. Baxter, *op. cit.*, p. 22.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 23.
11. *Ibid.* See also Buzzell, *op. cit.*, p. 81.
12. Baxter, *op. cit.*, p. 115, note 5.
13. Buzzell, *op. cit.*, p. 85.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 87 f.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 89.
16. Baxter, *op. cit.*, p. 31 f.
17. Isaac Dalton Stewart, *The History of the Freewill Baptists, for Half a Century, with an Introductory Chapter*, Vol. I, Dover, NH: Freewill Baptist Printing Establishment, 1862, p. 64.
18. This term was used to describe the established churches (Congregationalist) in New England.
19. Baxter, *op. cit.*, p. 44.
20. Stewart, *op. cit.*, p. 175 f.
21. Frederick L. Wiley, *Life and Influence of Rev. Benjamin Randall, Founder of the Free Baptist Denomination*, Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1915, p. 190.
22. Stewart, *op. cit.*, p. 240.
23. *Ibid.*
24. *Ibid.*, p. 250 f.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 251 f.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 436.
27. *Minutes of the General Conference of the Freewill Baptist Connection*, Dover: Freewill Baptist Printing Establishment, 1859, pp. 338 f.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 35.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 74 f.

Chapter VII

1. Burkitt and Read, *op. cit.*, p. 28.
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 208, 225.
3. C. B. Hassell and S. H. Hassell, *History of the Church of God, Including Especially the History of the Kehukee Primitive Baptist Association*, Middletown, NY: Gilbert Beebe's Son, Publishers, 1886, pp. 736 f.
4. Hearn, "Origin," *op. cit.*, p. 161.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 167.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 169.
7. Wheeler, *op. cit.*, p. 7; Hearn. "Origin," *op. cit.*, pp. 171-172.
8. Davidson, *op. cit.*, pp. 119-120, suggests two possible candidates: (1) Howell Hearn, father of Rufus K. Hearn, and (2) John Winfield, who was pastor of the church at Pungo in 1790 and was possibly still living in 1807.
9. These are abstracts of the minutes that are found in Thad Harrison and J. M. Barfield, *History of the Free Will Baptists in North Carolina*, Ayden, NC: The Free Will Baptist Publishing Company, 1897.

10. See Appendixes A and B in *The Articles of Faith and Principles of Church Government for Original Free Will Baptist (of the General Baptists Heritage)*, Ayden, NC: Free Will Baptist Press Foundation, n.d.
11. *Ibid.*, pp. XV, XVI.
12. *Ibid.*, P. XI.
13. *Ibid.*, pp. XXIV, XXV. Articles XI, which deals with the doctrine of Election, follows closely the wording of an article in the Confession of 1660; yet, it apparently could be interpreted as supporting a Calvinist position.
14. *Ibid.*, p. XXIII: Cf. the statement on the Scriptures in the Confession of 1660 on page XV.
15. Hugh T. Lefler and Albert Ray Newsome, *The History of a Southern State: North Carolina*, 3rd ed., Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1973, pp. 319, 320.
16. Harrison and Barfield, *History of the Free Will Baptists in North Carolina*, rev. ed., Book Two, p. 352 f.; C. C. Ware, *Hookerton History*, New Bern, NC: Owen G. Dunn Co., p. 29 f.
17. The author is indebted for much of the information on Elias Hutchins to Edmundo Gonzales, "Elias Hutchins: Friend of North Carolina Free Will Baptists": Unpublished Manuscript. See also his "Sketches of Religion in America," *The Free Will Baptist*, June 29, 1977, pp. 3, 4; July 7, 1977, pp. 3, 4; July 27, 1977, pp. 3, 4; September 27, 1977, pp. 3, 4.
18. That circular letter is preserved in Harrison and Barfield, rev. ed. *op. cit.*, Book One, pp. 158-161.
19. Hudson, *op. cit.*, p. 27.
20. *Ibid.*, pp. 143-145.

Chapter VIII

1. Charles C. Ware, ed. *Tar Heel Disciples*, 1841-1852, New Bern, NC: Owen G. Dunn Co., Printers, 1942, pp. 5-6.
2. Cited in Charles C. Ware, *Hookerton History*, New Bern, NC: Owen G. Dunn Co., Printer, 1960, p. 30.
3. Ware, *Tar Heel Disciples*, 1981-1852, pp. 11-12.
4. Charles C. Ware, *History of the Disciples of Christ in North Carolina*, St. Louis, MO: Christian Board of Publication, 1927, p. 92 f.
5. Ware, *Tar Heel Disciples*, 1841-1852, pp. 22-24.
6. Cited in Ware, *Hookerton History*, p. 31.
7. *Ibid.*

8. Charles C. Ware, *Pamlico Profile*, New Bern, NC: Printed by Owen G. Dunn Co., 1961, pp. 11, 25.
9. A copy of this letter is in the Jeremiah Heath papers in the Historical Collection at Mount Olive College.
10. Harrison and Barfield, *op. cit.*, Book One, pp. 187 f.
11. Ware, *Tar Heel Disciples*, pp. 27-28.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 19.
13. For a more complete account of these developments see C. C. Ware, *History of the Disciples of Christ in North Carolina*, pp. 86-90.
14. Ware, *Tar Heel Disciples*, p. 36.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 96.
16. Harrison and Barfield, *op. cit.*, Book Two, p. 195.
17. *Ibid.*
18. *Ibid.*, p. 196.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 197.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 198.
21. *Ibid.*
22. Ware, *Hookerton History*, p. 8.
23. Harrison and Barfield, *op. cit.*, Book Two, p. 354 f.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 201.
25. See D. B. Montgomery, *op. cit.*, pp. 142-178.

Chapter IX

1. The manuscript minutes of early sessions of the Cape Fear Conference are in the Historical Collection at Mount Olive College.
2. Harrison and Barfield, *op. cit.*, p. 220.
3. Minutes of the Chattahoochee United Baptist Association, 1850, p. 1. Cited by Davidson, *op. cit.*, p. 260. See also their position on the independence of the local church in Davidson, *op. cit.*, 243 f.
4. Harrison and Barfield, *op. cit.*, p. 202.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 204.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 211.
7. Ware, *Hookerton History*, pp. 8-9.
8. Harrison and Barfield, *op. cit.*, Book Two, p. 226 f.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 267.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 229.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 288.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 240.
13. The author acknowledges his indebtedness to an editorial which appeared in *The Free Will Baptist* for July 8, 1942, p. 3.

Chapter X

1. The Ayden Seminary and Eureka College will be treated in more detail in the next chapter.
2. Minutes of the Tenth General Conference of Freewill Baptists, *Minutes of the General Conference of the Freewill Baptist Connection*, Dover: Published by the Freewill Baptist Printing Establishment, 1859, pp. 183, 184.
3. *Minutes of the Thirty-fourth General Conference of Free Baptists* (1910), pp. 91-107.
4. It is significant that in this statement of faith Article 18, "Ordinances of the Gospel," omits Feet-washing, a practice which had been abandoned by most Northern Freewill Baptists.
5. The author has not been able to determine how this change in the statement on Sanctification came about, nor whether or not there was made to it in the minutes of the Cape Fear Conference from this period.
6. See the mimeograph copy of the "History of the Pentecostal Free Will Baptist Church, Inc.," in the Historical Collection at Mount Olive College.
7. Damon Dodd assumed that this issue was raised at the 1918 session of the Co-operative General Association, but there is no record of it in the minutes of that session. Moreover, conferences in North Carolina sent delegates to the 1919 session. See his *The Free Will Baptist Story*, Nashville, TN: Executive Department of the National Association, 1956, p. 116.

Chapter XI

1. This chapter is a revision of the author's booklet entitled *A History of Ayden Seminary and Eureka College*, printed by the Free Will Baptist Press, c. 1980.

Chapter XII

1. Lefler and Newsome, *op. cit.*, p. 615.
2. Two older brothers of the author were students at Zion. Daniel F. Pelt enrolled in the first class in 1930 and Chester H. Pelt entered in 1932. Both later earned college degrees.
3. "A Centennial Celebration: Zion Free Will Baptist Church," Free Will Baptist Collection at Mount Olive College.

4. "Minutes of the Thirteenth Annual Session of the General Conference of the Original Free Will Baptists of the United States," Ayden, NC: Free Will Baptist Press, 1933, p. 12.
5. "Minutes of the Co-operative General Association," in session at Denison, Texas, on November 8, 1934. Cited by Damon C. Dodd, *op. cit.*, p. 120.
6. Davidson, *op. cit.*, p. 397.

Chapter XIII

1. Among those who volunteered for service, Rev. Chester H. Pelt, who was then serving as pastor of a church in Durham, NC, was the first Free Will Baptist minister to be inducted as a chaplain in the armed forces of the United States. He was commissioned as a First Lieutenant in the U.S. Army on June 29, 1943. He was discharged in June 1948 but remained in the Army Reserves until 1972 when he retired with the rank of Colonel. He died in November 1994 at the age of eighty-two.
2. For more information on Cragmont's early history and for a list of donors see the paper written by De Wayne Eakes, "History of Cragmont Assembly, Inc.: Origin and Development" in the Historical Collection at Mount Olive College.

Chapter XIV

1. The author is indebted to W. Burkette Raper, "A History of Mount Olive Junior College--The First Decade, 1951-1961," an unpublished paper in the Free Will Baptist Historical Collection at Mount Olive College.
2. Copies of these letters are on file in the Free Will Baptist Historical Collection at Mount Olive College.
3. The original copy of this letter is on file in the Historical Collection at Mount Olive College; Raper, *op. cit.*, pp. 69-70.
4. Minutes, Board of Directors of Mount Olive Junior College, May 27, 1958; cited by Raper, *op. cit.*, p. 70.
5. Ronald Creech, "The Challenger" (Durham, NC), February 8, 1960; Raper, *op. cit.*, p. 70.
6. Creech, "The Challenger," February 29, 1960, p. 5.
7. Jerry Ballard, ed., "Perception," March-April, 1960, pp. 4, 6, 8; cited by Raper, *op. cit.*, p. 74.
8. "Minutes of the State Convention of Churches of the Original Free Will Baptists of North Carolina," 1960, pp. 40, 41.

9. The author acknowledges indebtedness to the following sources in his treatment of the Edgemont Church dispute: Donald Coates, "Controversy Edgemont Dispute; a thesis submitted to the School of Arts and Sciences of Wake Forest University, 1971; Issues of "The Challenger" (Durham, NC); W. Burkette Raper, "Current Issues Among Free Will Baptists," unpublished paper, 1961; "The Western Conference Reports on the Edgemont Church Dispute"; *The Free Will Baptist*, Ayden, NC, August, 2, 1961, pp. 6, 7; Aug. 9, 1961, pp. 4, 13; Aug. 16, 1961, pp. 4, 13, 14; Aug. 23, 1961, pp. 4, 13, 16; Aug. 30, 1961, pp. 3, 14-16; Sept. 6, 1961, pp. 3-5; North Carolina Supreme Court *Minutes*, Fall Term, 1961; Fall Term, 1962; Spring Term, 1963; Fall Term, 1961; Fall Term, 1962; Spring Term, 1963; Fall Term, 1963; K. Alan Lamm, "The Free Will Baptist Schism of 1961-1962" (Duke University), 1988; Edward C. Morris, *That You May Know*, Ayden, NC: Free Will Baptist Press, 1962.
10. Donald Coates, "Controversy at Edgemont," unpublished paper in the Historical Collection at Mount Olive College.
11. "Western Conference Reports on the Edgemont Dispute," *The Free Will Baptist*, Aug. 16, 1961, p. 13.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 14.
13. "Western Conference Reports," *op. cit.*, Aug. 23, 1961, p. 4.
14. "Western Conference Reports," *op. cit.*, Aug. 30, 1961, pp. 3, 14-16.
15. "Western Conference Reports," *op. cit.*, Sept. 6, 1961, p. 5.
16. "Minutes of the National Association of Free Will Baptists," 1961, pp. 17, 18.
17. Editorial, *The Free Will Baptist*, January 10, 1962, pp. 5, 15.
18. North Carolina Supreme Court, *Minutes*, Spring Term, 1963, p. 18.

Chapter XV

1. The information in the following paragraphs was provided by the current Executive Director of the Children's Home.
2. Much of the information on the Retirement Homes program was supplied by the current Director of this ministry.

Chapter XVI

1. *The Free Will Baptist*, March 5, 1969, p. 9.
2. The author was a visitor at the meeting of the Baptist World Alliance in Miami, Florida, in 1965, by request of the Convention's Executive Committee and he brought back a report of his observations at this meeting.

3. These observations are based on the responses of several leading ministers of the denomination who were asked to comment on the most important developments as well as significant problems facing the denomination during the past thirty years.
4. The author is indebted to Mrs. Happy Taylor for much of the information concerning the Woman's Auxiliary Convention in this and the following paragraphs.
5. Information in this and the following paragraphs was provided by Mrs. Mary Dudley.

FWB Denominational Ministry Directors



Bobby Taylor
FWB Children's
Home



John Williams
Cragmont Assembly

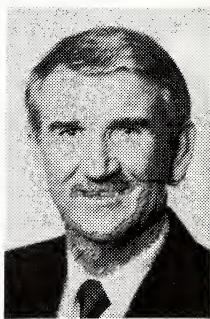


Don Fader
Minister's Program
Church Finance



R. Cliff Gray
FWB Press

Picture
Not
Available



Walter Sutton
Retirement Homes

Harold Jones
Foreign Missions



David C. Hansley
Home Missions &
Evangelism



Mary Dudley
Sunday School
Board



William Byrd
Mount Olive
College

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- Minutes of the Pee Dee Association of Original Free Will Baptists of North Carolina, 1940-1974.
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In 1957 he joined the faculty of Mount Olive College, Mount Olive, North Carolina, where he served as chair of the department of religion and in other positions at the college until his retirement in 1994. He attended graduate school at Duke University and earned the Ph.D degree in 1966. While at Cambridge University in England in 1973-74 on a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Humanities, he toured parts of England, southern Europe, and the Middle East.

The author has served his denomination in several roles in addition to his teaching career at Mount Olive College. He was secretary of the North Carolina Convention for five years (1957-62), and at different times he served on the Convention's Executive Committee, the Chaplain's Commission, the Board of Publications and Literature, and the Historical Commission. As a member of the Central Conference, he has served on its Ordaining Council for a total of 15 years and on the Executive Committee for one year.

He was married to Betty Ethridge in 1953. They are the parents of four children: Cary, Teresa (deceased), Sharon, and Julie. Mrs. Pelt is a retired public school teacher.



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A History of Original Free Will Baptists will be invaluable to members of this church in learning about the heritage of their faith; it will also be an indispensable resource for others who wish to have an informed understanding of one of the oldest religious bodies in North Carolina.

Dr. W. Burkette Raper
President Emeritus of Mount Olive College
(President 1954-1995)

Dr. Michael R. Pelt has made an indispensable contribution to the understanding of the history and heritage of Original Free Will Baptists in this excellent and scholarly volume.

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Former Executive Administrator
Convention of Original Free Will Baptists

This book is an excellent account of a movement which has evolved into the Convention of Original Free Will Baptists. It provides the basic information that is needed to understand who we are and how we arrived at the place where we find ourselves today. Dr. Pelt uncovers the drama of our history while bringing into focus the happenings in other groups and movements that impacted upon the development of our denomination. The book also provides valuable information about the progress and failures of the past that can help us shape our future.

Rev. W. Scott Sowers
Executive Administrator
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Mount Olive College Press
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ISBN 1-880994-26-7
\$21.95

426 RF M 3100
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